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STITCHED FROM THE SOUL  
AN AUTO/BIOGRAPHICAL INQUIRY INTO ONE BLACK WOMAN  
ADMINISTRATOR'S VOICE AND VISION

by

SONYA D. JEFFERSON

(Under the Direction of Ming Fang He)

ABSTRACT

This study is an auto/biographical inquiry into my voice and vision as a Black woman administrator. I explore the lives of four generations of Black women in my family. Each of these women – Hattie C. Wilcher (my great grandmother), Connie W. Duggan (my mother), Danielle R. Lowe (my daughter), and I – have studied and/or taught in public schools in the U. S. south. I explore how my family narrative parallels community and historical narratives and contests the meta narrative in existing literature. I explore these narratives through the lenses of Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought to better understand how our experiences as Black females in an endemically racist educational system impact my practice as principal of a Title I elementary school. More than fifty years after the ruling in Brown v. Board of Education, gaps in achievement among Black students and their white peers persist while efforts at school reform fail to meet expectations. Drawing on the knowledge I have gained from my

participants and the inquiry, I offer an ethic of care-and-justice as a framework for transforming schools, such as the one I lead, into spaces where all children can reach their highest potential.

INDEX WORDS: Achievement Gaps, Autobiography, Black Education, Black Feminist Thought, Critical Race Theory, Multicultural Education, School Reform, Educational Leadership

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AN AUTO/BIOGRAPHICAL INQUIRY INTO ONE BLACK WOMAN  
ADMINISTRATOR'S VOICE AND VISION

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2006

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by

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Electronic Version Approved:  
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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to DaJaun and all other bright eyed four year olds living on the margins.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work has been intense, consuming, at times exciting, at others frustrating but always and ultimately a labor of love. I am eternally indebted to many for its completion. With deep appreciation I acknowledge my committee members. Dr. Ming Fang He, thank you so much for your wise guidance and support. So often you knew what I was trying to say and where my work needed to go while I was still stumbling in the dark. You pushed when I got slack, waited patiently when I needed space, and never doubted my ability to get it done. Your incredible passion and respect for life stories is infectious and my life has been enriched for having met you. Dr. Sandra Nettles, thank you for sharing your powerful story. Your work helped me see how lessons in my story Dr., Marla Morris, you challenged me to see the history of education and my own experiences in schools differently. For that I will be eternally grateful. Dr. Meta Harris, you provided an invaluable example for reading Black women's autobiographies and for writing my own. Because you had, I believed I could – thank you. My SISTERS, Cheryl and Virginia, you will never know how much your support and encouragement have meant. I hope to return the favor. Mom, Frank, Danielle, and DaJaun, thank you for your support and patience. The time this work took from you can never be regained. I only hope the person I have become because of it makes it worthwhile. Hattie, Lilla, Daddy, and Gramps – I hope you are smiling.



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## PROLOGUE

It's a Sunday night in mid July and I am standing in front of an empty suitcase. I have thrown shoes and clothes everywhere but I can't seem to clear my head long enough to decide what to pack. Fifty-two degrees sounds so cold when you're standing in July Augusta heat. In all honesty, I am beginning to regret agreeing to make the trip. The Reading 1<sup>st</sup> grant required the school to send an administrator and the literacy coach to the National Reading 1<sup>st</sup> conference in Minneapolis. With a new baby, the principal could not go and it was no problem two months ago when I agreed to attend. Now, the timing was bad. Four days ago, I was an assistant principal preparing for the upcoming school year. One brief meeting with the superintendent changed everything. He had been short and to the point.

The previous principal retired suddenly ... I've submitted your name to the Board ... over half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> graders did not meet standard on the CRCT ... the building is being renovated ... the Board meets tomorrow night ... are you ready? Tonight, standing in the middle of my packing mayhem, I am an elementary school principal responsible for the education of over 300 children, and no, I am not ready.

My work as assistant principal at Windsor Spring feels incomplete. With two years of a massive school improvement effort behind us, we are looking forward to the school reaping the fruits of its labors. We are leading the faculty through real change that will have a positive impact on the lives of our students. With a focus on reading instruction, actively engaging students in their own learning, and teaching for understanding, we are creating a school that provides an empowering education for the low-income minority population we serve. Test scores for our general population are up

and well above the benchmarks set by the state. The Reading 1<sup>st</sup> grant will contribute over \$500,000 toward our efforts. The conference, we hope, will offer ideas we can use to excite and energize teachers for another year of hard work. Leaving before our dream fully materializes is not part of my plan.

But beyond my feelings about leaving work undone, I am feeling strangely out of touch with myself, confused, and off balance. The same questions keep running through my mind. How do I recreate myself as principal in such a short time? What does this school need from me? Where does it need to go, need me to lead it? What vision should I have for the school and for my leadership? With less than a month before the school year begins, how can I possibly prepare myself to be principal of Terrace Manor Elementary School? How do I recreate myself as “principal” especially for a school that has been through so many changes and challenges?

With the changes in leadership, shifting around of staff, and rezoning of students, the past few years have been unsettling for Terrace Manor. I will be the fourth principal in four years. Now in 2004, the building is finally being renovated, another disruption that will continue into next summer. The front of the building has been demolished, air conditioning units have been removed, restrooms are being completely redone, and everything is covered with red Georgia clay. There isn’t even a sign outside to let visitors know it is Terrace Manor. Teachers will be back in three weeks and I can not imagine the building or me being ready. But, out of all this chaos and displacement, both mine and the school’s, I will have to find some direction, for myself and Terrace Manor. My dissertation has come to be about this search for direction.

Transitions are often a topic when Dr. He and I talk about work. My story, she shares with me, does not flow because my thoughts shift too suddenly from one topic to another. As I think about this I realize my inquiry is in many ways about transitions. Often it seems my life also shifts abruptly. Disruptions force me to make sudden changes in direction and flow. I think about the sudden move from Oklahoma to Georgia that forced me to transition from a desegregated to a segregated school. Then there was the sudden death of my father that forced me to transition out of childhood. There was the sudden end to my first marriage which led me into single parenthood, and now, a sudden promotion forcing me out of my comfort zone. When these events are viewed out of context, my life, like the quilts my grandmother pieced together, seems to lack continuity and flow.

But as I continue to reflect on the quilts and my life, I realize this is a false perception. When viewed from a distance, context becomes clear, patterns and themes in the quilt and in my life become visible. There are connections among the quilt squares and among the moments in my life that provide a sense of each being a piece of a whole. Through a close reading of the stories I share I find the patterns and connections in my life. I begin to understand who I was and how I became who I am. With that understanding I complete another transition this time from Black girl child silenced by fear, to empowered Black woman administrator making a difference in the lives of Black children.



Figure 1: My grandmother Lilla Wilcher Wright



Figure 2: Grandma Lilla's Pinwheel Quilt



Figure 3: Grandma Lilla's Doll Quilt



Figure 4: Grandma Lilla's Crazy Quilt



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This study is an auto/biographical inquiry into my voice and vision as a Black woman administrator. I explore the lives of four generations of Black women from my family. Each of these women – Hattie C. Wilcher (my great grandmother), Connie W. Duggan (my mother), Danielle R. Lowe (my daughter), and I – have studied and/or taught in American public schools. I explore our lives to better understand how our experiences in an endemically racist educational system impact my practice as a school leader. My study builds on scholarship in Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought. Critical Race Theory uses the experiential knowledge of people of color to explore the role of race and racism in context and uses that knowledge to counter hegemonic beliefs. Black Feminist Thought challenges Black women to resist negative controlling images and define themselves. Methodologically, I demonstrate the use of auto/biographical inquiry as I reflexively analyze past experiences to better understand their impact on my practice as an elementary school principal. With that understanding I work to improve the educational experiences of others.

Traditionally, life writing has been classified along three continuums: public/private; self/other; immediacy/memory (Stanley, 1993). The term auto/biography disrupts these classifications. The lines between self/other, biography/autobiography are irrelevant. We live our lives in connection with others making it impossible for us to tell our stories without telling their stories as well. Even diary writing, the most private form of life writing, the act of putting one's story on paper "through its presupposition of an audience dissolves" the public/private distinction (p. 48). Life writing is always an act of

memory. “Descriptions of events and conversations are post hoc constructions” and “memory is always and inevitably involved when writing post hoc” (p. 49).

In using auto/biography to describe my work, I acknowledge that my life has been lived in connection with and has been significantly influenced by others, particularly my mother, grandmother, great grandmother, and daughter. I include stories from their lives in my own. I also acknowledge that the stories I tell are constructions dependent on memory. I check my stories against life documents and against the memories of others yet they are always “less than the absolute truth” (Harris, 2003, p. 65). I also accept that by using my stories as scholarship they become public. Acknowledging this leaves me feeling vulnerable to judgments and criticisms of my experiences and my writing. In spite of these feelings, I must write and share my stories.

For Black women living in America telling our stories is necessary (Harris, 2003). We “write [our] lives as a way of writing [ourselves] free...from the stereotypical and derogatory images that have been inflicted upon [us]” (p. 56). From infancy we are bombarded with negative images of ourselves in literature, movies, music, and television. Without counter-stories to contradict those images we accept them as truth and form our identities around them. Reading the lives of other Black women and writing our own reveals the falseness of those images and allows us to recreate ourselves in our own image. Our auto/biographies form a counter-narrative to the dominate discourse allowing us to define ourselves and our reality.

Auto/biography as a form of curriculum inquiry has its roots in the reconceptualization of the curriculum field from one dedicated to studying the technicalities of teaching to one committed to the understanding of educational

experience (Pinar, et al., 2000). For curriculum scholars, the goal of education is not simply “to prepare students for success in...classrooms” but rather “the cultivation of original thought” (Pinar, et al, 2000, p. 19-20). Unfortunately, the education many of us receive in schools fails to prepare us to think creatively. We are not taught to imagine new possibilities. Schools too often limit our thinking to mastery of standards, goals, and objectives. The “cultivation of original thought” requires a breaking free from that miseducation. Auto/biography provides a method through which we can write ourselves free.

As auto/biographical inquirers, we work at discovered intersections among the social, the political, the historical, and the self. We look back, reflecting on those experiences that most influenced who we were and how we became who we are. We look forward, imagining futures of our own creation. We then bring the past and the future to bear on the present as we work to improve the educational experiences of others.

For this study, I look back to the family stories I grew up hearing and to my own experiences in schools. I piece together memories of lived events, memories of stories told, and information gathered from documents to create a narrative of school experiences across four generations. I situate this family narrative within the context of community and historical narrative. I then explore my narrative through the theoretical lens of Critical Race Theory, to gain a better understanding of how experiences in an endemically racist educational system impact my practice as a school administrator. With this understanding, I further develop my vision as a school leader.

### **Tracing the Roots of My Inquiry**

My study began as a multicultural exploration mini-project focused on school desegregation. Using narrative inquiry, I explored the legal history of public school desegregation in the United States and the loss of care that followed. I collected stories from my mother had who attended segregated schools in Washington County, Georgia and from my husband, Frank, who had lived the transition from segregated to desegregated schools in Richmond, Virginia. Sitting around my mother's kitchen table they shared these stories.

### **Mom's Story**

There was no lunchroom until '58 when the high school moved into the new building. But there was a store on campus where we could buy crackers and drinks. No Black kids rode the bus. One did bring kids from Davisboro. It stopped about ½ mile from the house but I had to walk to the other side of town because they said I lived too close to the school. When the new school opened, we were allowed to ride the bus but I did live too close then. To be honest, when you don't know any different... We didn't know we were being mistreated. I'm sure there were things they had that we didn't, but we didn't know it. It would have been nice to have the books and equipment but as far as instruction, I think things were better. And when I think about kids in schools today, I know we learned more.

### **Frank's Story**

Richmond desegregated when busing started in 1971-72. I was a sophomore. Before that we always had used, used books. I can remember seeing the names of white schools in the books. We didn't play white schools in sports until '72.

There were only two Black high schools in Richmond so teams had to travel as far as Norfolk. Our population changed after integration too, we went from maybe 2000 students to about 1200-1400. White teachers came into the all Black schools and white students were bused in. I'm not sure where they came from but I know they weren't from our neighborhoods. (Laughter) Yeah, that was the year I failed geometry, my first white teacher. My English teacher was white too but didn't know what to do so she passed everybody. Think about it a white teacher with all Black kids. Black teachers treated us like we were their children. They were Mamas and Daddies. The white teachers just taught us. Don't get me wrong they (Black teachers) taught us but with all the Black teachers I got, somebody in my family always knew them, it was like an extended family.

The stories Mom and Frank shared testified to the caring embedded in their segregated schools and lacking in the desegregated schools I attended as a child. This caring, communicated through high expectations, a refusal to accept failure, and a commitment to doing whatever was necessary to ensure students' success, enabled Black children to be successful despite the incredible hardships most segregated Black schools endured. Ruth Barton Crawford, a Black graduate of Paine College in Augusta, Georgia and a former teacher in segregated schools, describes it as "teaching as if the woods are on fire" (Crawford, 1992, p. 87). She writes,

Have you ever seen an extensive wood fire? One where the flames roar through the trees and brush and burn for days over a great area of land? I sort of would see myself as a fireman who would never dream of quitting but just goes on battling to overcome the blaze that was seeking to destroy knowledge. ... I came to see

that I had to teach as if the woods were on fire to douse the flames of ignorance, apathy and depression before they wiped out my classroom. (p. 87-88)

It is this level of passion and commitment that was missing from my own experiences in desegregated schools.

My earliest educational experiences occurred in predominately white schools with white teachers. My memories of those classrooms are limited. I have memories of learning to read with Dick and Jane, of my second grade teacher slamming a ruler across my desk for talking, of wanting to join the Blue Birds but not being welcomed, and of daily stomachaches that were eventually blamed on nerves. There are memories of feeling alone and afraid. There are also feelings of loss. That perhaps I am not the person I would have been had I shared those classrooms with teachers who viewed teaching and learning as “counter-hegemonic acts” (hooks, 1994, p. 2). It is a loss I believe many Black children attending our public schools today feel as well.

My belief grows out of the years I spent teaching in public schools. So many of the Black children I taught seemed unwilling to participate in the educational process. My concern grew when my own child entered middle school and seemed to turn her back on school, refusing to do any more than was necessary to get by. I could not make sense of it. Education has always been important in our family. My great, great grandfather, Isaac Cummings, was a founder of the first school for Blacks in Washington County, Georgia, established in 1889. His daughter, Hattie Cummings Wilcher, was my great grandmother and a teacher for over 30 years (1912 – 1949). My mother, Connie Wilcher Duggan, graduated from high school in 1959 and 15 years later returned to school and earned an associate degree. I was the first person in my family to graduate from college.

By the time my daughter, Danielle, was in middle school I had put myself through graduate school. I could not understand why Danielle, with such a history as a foundation, would refuse to fully engage in her education. How could she and so many others reject an opportunity our ancestors had fought and died for?

The resistance I saw in Danielle and other young Black students sent me in search of answers. My search eventually led to the Curriculum Studies program at Georgia Southern University. It was here, while studying multicultural education, that I had the opportunity to read *Too much schooling too little education: A paradox of Black life in White societies* (Shujaa, 1994). In the pages of this book I became aware of schooling's ability to "serve as well as betray" the interests of Black Americans (p. 14). The focus of my questions then began to change. Rather than asking what is wrong with Black children I began to question what is wrong with our schools. More importantly, how might they be transformed to better meet the needs of all children in general and Black children in particular? How can principals develop the visionary leadership needed to transform them? How does my experience of a racist educational system impact my practice as leader of a Title I elementary school?

### **Understanding the Context**

Visionary leaders have the ability to imagine schools differently. They can imagine schools where educators ignore statistics and Black children succeed. Researchers have shown us such schools exist (Carter, 2000; Johnson & Asera, 1999; Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner, 1999). Researchers have also revealed for us some of the qualities of the administrators who lead them (McLaughlin, 1990; Schmoker, 1999).

Less is known about how to develop such leaders (Fullan, 1993; Lashway, 1997). Their development is vital to erasing the achievement gaps Black students suffer.

For those who claim to hold schools accountable to meeting the needs of students (politicians, policy makers, parents, the media) success means improving standardized test scores and increasing graduation rates. By these standards many of the 36.4 million Blacks living in the United States are not being successful in schools. The fact that Black students, regardless of economic status or educational level tend, to lag behind their white counterparts on various indicators of academic achievement has been well documented (Jenks & Phillips, 1998). Nationwide, Black kindergarten students score lower on attitudinal measures including persisting at a task, being eager to learn, and sustaining attention (U. S. Department of Education, 2000). Fewer Black children beginning kindergarten demonstrate proficiency in letter recognition and identification of beginning and ending sounds than white students and most other minorities. Eleven percent of all Blacks between the ages of 16 and 19 are not in school and do not hold a high school diploma (Day & Jamieson, 2003). Only 26% of Blacks graduate five years after entering college and Black students post the lowest grade point averages upon entering and leaving college (Williams, 2000).

In Georgia, home to over two million Blacks, 11% of Black high school students fail one or more sections of the high school graduation test (Georgia Department of Education Report Card, 2003). As a result, they receive a certificate of attendance rather than a high school diploma. Only three percent of whites completing high school receive certificates of attendance. At third grade, thirteen percent of Black students compared to five percent of white students fail to meet the grade level standard in reading on the



Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). At fifth grade, twenty-one percent of Black students compared to nine percent of white students fail to meet grade level standard in Reading while twenty-five percent of Blacks compared to ten percent of whites fail to meet the standard in math. Meeting the standard in Mathematics at 5<sup>th</sup> grade and Reading and Mathematics at third grade is a requirement for promotion. As a result, over 50% of the students retained in 2004 were Black.

Statistics for the school I lead reflect trends visible in the general population. At the beginning of the 2003 school year, less than 50% of the kindergarteners demonstrated proficiency with the necessary pre-reading skills. Only 63% of the first graders finished the year reading on grade level. Over 40% of the third, fourth, and fifth graders could not read on grade level. These results demonstrated Adequate Yearly Progress as defined by President Bush's school reform efforts. They do not indicate adequate progress toward erasing the achievement gaps that plague Black students. I recognize that standardized tests scores and graduation rates do not accurately reflect the educational experiences of children. I also recognize that as long as such statistics determine access to opportunities, we must prepare all children to do well. Testing and accountability do not ensure that schools will make the instructional changes necessary to meet the needs of Black students. Visionary school leaders can.

As the instructional leaders in schools, principals bear the responsibility for giving schools direction by creating, communicating, and sustaining a vision (North Carolina Regional Educational Laboratory, 1995). Keeping all resources focused on that vision is a vital function of leadership (Schomaker, 1999) especially in schools that struggle to close achievement gaps between their predominately Black populations and white

students. Unfortunately, principals receive little guidance in developing vision. We learn to collect data and conduct needs assessments, but this information lacks the emotion and passion needed to inspire. To create a passionate vision that inspires and motivates we need to “see from the point of view of the participant”; we need to see from the view of children in schools (Greene, 1995, p. 10). Stories from our own lives in schools can provide such a view making auto/biography a legitimate form of inquiry for developing visionary school leaders.

As an auto/biographical inquirer I look back reflecting on those experiences that most influenced who I was and how I became who I am. I look forward to my hope for schools that empower Black children. I bring the past and future to bear on the present as I further develop my own vision as a school leader. Doing auto/biographical work, however, involves risk. I must explore memories that are at times painful. I must risk even more by revealing my discoveries about those memories. Revealing too much leaves my work open to accusations of solipsism and egocentrism. Revealing too little prevents the reader from identifying with my experiences. As an auto/biographical inquirer I must find a balance revealing only those stories most relevant to the issues I engage.

As I reflect on my stories I begin to see my life as interwoven with the lives of four other strong Black women: my great grandmother Hattie Cummings Wilcher, my grandmother Lilla Wilcher Wright, my mother Connie Wilcher Duggan, and my daughter Danielle Renee Lowe. From my Grandma Lilla I inherited a love of quilts. The quilts she and other women in my family made together have always fascinated me. Many times patterns were cut from empty flour sacks, dresses that could no longer be worn, and

old quilts that could no longer be used. From these salvaged odds and ends, a new quilt would form, not always attractive, but functional and durable, each stitch representing a love for family and a commitment to survival. I think of my life stories as one of those quilts (Ray & McFadden, 2001). Each square depicts a “nodal moment” pieced together from fragments of memories and stories (Graham, 1998 as cited in Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). The squares once stitched together create a whole. Each look at the whole brings a new interpretation and each interpretation brings a new meaning (Bateson, 1989).

My Grandmother learned her quilting skills from her mother, Hattie Cummings Wilcher. Hattie was a teacher with over thirty years of experience in Georgia schools when she retired in 1949. She instilled in each of her children a drive to succeed despite obstacles, a drive my mother Connie Wilcher Duggan passed on to me, and I to my daughter Danielle. She raised her children during a period in history when survival for a Black woman often required silence. Revealing her thoughts to the wrong person would place her and her family in danger. I inherited my great grandmother’s silence, passed from generation to generation and reinforced in my life by an endemically racist educational system. I overcome that silence and gain understanding of how my experiences inform my practice by viewing the quilt of my life in the context of family, community, and history. With this understanding, I further develop my vision for schools that educate and empower Black children and I find the courage to bring that vision to life.

Loneliness, fear, and the silence they produce fill my stories of life in classrooms. As I explore my stories, I realize this silence influenced who I was and how I became who I am. With a new understanding of my stories I can free myself of the silence my

experiences produced and gain the courage to speak for those now struggling to navigate their way through our schools and societies. This dissertation testifies to my journey out of that silence and through the process of developing of my vision and voice as an elementary school principal.

### **Significance of the Study**

For Black Americans, completing high school and being prepared to succeed in college is imperative. Over 36 million Blacks live in the United States. Nine million of them live in poverty (McKinnon, 2001). Thirty-six percent of those living in poverty are children. In Georgia, 40% of the 546,583 Blacks living in poverty are children under the age of 15. Children living in poverty are more likely to suffer from developmental delays and learning disabilities (Wood, 2003). They are more likely to be retained, expelled, or suspended from school and more likely to dropout of high school. The median income for Black 18 year olds who do not graduate from high school is less than \$11,000 per year.

We can break this cycle by providing Black children with an empowering education that prepares them to be successful beyond high school. Creating such schools requires visionary leaders who “look at things as if they could be otherwise” (Greene, 1995, p. 19).

The view from a bureaucratic...distance makes us see in terms of trends, tendencies, and theoretically predictable events. Whenever we are shown a report or a statistical account of what is happening within a school district or the system as a whole, this becomes evident. It is as if automatic processes were at work; it seems impossible to look at things as if they could be otherwise. When, however,

a person chooses to view herself or himself in the midst of things, as beginner or learner or explorer, and has the imagination to envisage new things emerging, more and more begins to seem possible....Imagining things being otherwise may be a first step toward acting on the belief that they can be changed. (p. 22)

Without that belief, things will not change and the statistics that sentence too many Black children to failure become reality.

### **Reading the Study**

This dissertation consists of a Prologue, four chapters – an introduction, the literature review and methodology, my auto/biography, a summary – and an epilogue. In the prologue I set the stage for my inquiry by sharing the moment from my life that sparked this exploration. In Chapter One, I explore how my family history, the social context of life in America during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and my experiences in schools as teacher and student influence my inquiry. I present my concerns about the current state of education for Black children in America and the questions that guide my inquiry.

My search for understanding lead to five bodies of literature: (1) the history of education for Blacks living in America; (2) the contributions of Black women to Black education in America; (3) Critical Race Theory and its implications for education; (4) Black Feminist Thought challenging negative images of Black women; and (5) Black women writing their lives. I review each of these bodies of literature in Chapter Two. I trace the history of Black education in America through the paradigms of missionary societies, northern industrialists, and Black Americans themselves. Each group sought to educate Blacks for distinct purposes. Those purposes influenced the curriculum they put

in place. The self-reliance many Blacks sought required a curriculum that would prepare them for participation in government, the economy, and the workforce. Their goal also required that Black Americans value their own history and communities. Black American and African history became important components of their curriculum. In contrast, northern industrialists sought to limit participation in the same areas in which Blacks sought engagement. As a result, they pushed a curriculum designed to prepare Blacks for a continued subservience. Missionary societies sought full participation by Blacks in American societies but white America's terms. Their curriculum sought to assimilate Blacks into those existing societies. Many Black educators actively resisted the efforts by missionaries and northern industrialists. Among those activist educators were Black women such as Anna Julia Cooper, Lucy Craft Laney, and Mary McCleod Bethune. I explore the lives and educational philosophies of these women through their writings and life stories.

The history of Black women writing about their lives dates back to slavery. I explore three periods of that history beginning with the spiritual autobiography of Jarena Lee and the slave narratives of Harriett Jacobs, Harriett Wilson, and Elizabeth Keckley. From a second period I explore the stories of activist Ida B. Wells and Charlotte L. Forten. Finally I explore the lives of novelist Zora Neale Hurston, educator Meta Y. Harris, and civil rights activist Dorothy Height. A common thread of triumph over personal and social hardships runs through each of these periods and through the lives of each of the women I chose to study.

I explore their lives and mine through two lenses: Black Feminist Thought and Critical Race Theory. Black Feminist Thought offers insight into how the women I study

found the courage to challenge prevailing beliefs about themselves as Black women and about their race as a whole. I explore four moments in the development of Black Feminist Thought and the common themes threading through each of those moments. Critical Race Theory values the stories of the marginalized and shines a light on the impact of race and racism in those stories. The education I received left me believing race had no influence on my experiences in schools. Surviving the American educational system of the 1960's and 1970's necessitated my accepting this falsehood as truth. To challenge and eventually deconstruct this belief, I needed a theory that would open my eyes to issues of race and racism as they play out in my life and in schools.

I examine our stories for examples of and responses to microaggressions, “stunning, automatic acts of disregard that stem from unconscious attitudes of white superiority and constitute a verification of [Black] inferiority” (Davis, 1989, p. 10). In their least harmful form, microaggressions are avoidable and do not “culminate in an achievement of subordination” (p. 5). This is not true of microaggressions that might occur in school settings. Compulsory attendance laws prevent most children (the exceptions being those whose parents choose home schooling and those old enough to drop out) from avoiding school and in most classrooms they cannot avoid subordination. Children are expected to yield to the adult in the classroom and to do so respectfully. The classroom becomes a microaggression in which children in general and Black children in particular are considered inferior.

The management of these assaults is a preoccupying activity, simultaneously necessary to and disruptive of [B]lack adaptation. ...The individual, in order to maintain internal balance and to protect himself from being overwhelmed by it,

must initiate restitutive maneuvers...all quite automatic and unconscious. In addition to maintaining an internal balance, the individual must continue to maintain a social façade and some kind of adaptation to the offending stimuli so that he can preserve some social effectiveness. (Davis, 1989, p. 4)

A child preoccupied with self-preservation and maintaining a mask has little emotional or cognitive energy for the real business of schools, learning. I study the history of Black education and the lives of Black educators to understand how to counter this assault on Black children's self-worth and how to best structure schools to protect them from such abuses.

I also explore auto/biography as a form of curriculum inquiry, particularly its use by Black women. I first consider its use within the field of curriculum through Marla Morris's (2001) work with curriculum and the Holocaust and Ming Fang He's (2003) use of cross-cultural narrative inquiry to understand the experiences of three Chinese women. I then explore its use by Black women educators Loraine Cary (1991), bell hooks (1996), and Sandra Nettles (2001), and Meta Y. Harris (2003). In *Black Ice*, Cary (1991) examines her life as a Black teenager attending a previously all-white male preparatory school. Bell hooks (1996) uses stories from her own childhood to challenge majority notions about Black girlhood in *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood*. With *Crazy Visitation*, Nettles (2001) explores her experiences surviving a brain tumor and offers a reconceptualization of resilience as transformation. In "Black women writing autobiography: Marginalisation, Migration, and Self-Identity", Harris (2003) explores using auto/biography "as a tool for dealing with marginalisation, migration, and self-identity issues" (p. 5).



In Chapter Three I present my narrative. I share “nodal moments” (Graham, 1998 as cited in Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001) from the lives of my mother and her grandmother, from my own life and the life of my daughter. I situate my narrative within the context of the historical narrative around the desegregation of schools in the southern United States and one community narrative of that experience. I present the historical and community narratives in italics. I contend that this history and my experiences in desegregated and segregated classrooms impact my practice as a school leader and the vision I have for the school I lead. I analyze my narrative making new meaning of my stories and gaining new understanding of who I was and how I became who I am (Bateson, 1989). In Chapter Four, I share reflections that emerged from my inquiry. In the epilogue I share the current situation of my family and my work as a principal striving to bring my vision to life.

My work as a school leader makes auto/biographical inquiry an ethical requirement (Gay, 2003). Not exploring my educational history leaves space for me to transfer unresolved conflicts from my past experiences onto my present work and blocks the imagination required for creating my educational vision (Britzman & Pitt, 1996). Researching and writing my story is a prerequisite to becoming a good multicultural educational leader and to creating my vision for educating Black children. I hope that by exploring and sharing my story I encourage other educational leaders to do the same.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

This dissertation is an auto/biographical inquiry into my voice and vision as a Black woman administrator. I explore the educational experiences of four generations of Black women in my family: my great grandmother Hattie C. Wilcher, my mother Connie A. Duggan, my daughter Danielle R. Lowe, and myself. Survival for my great grandmother often required her silence; “talking back” risked physical injury or death (hooks, 1989, p. 5). The silence that resulted from her fear was passed down to me and reinforced by an educational system that placed little value on my experiences as a Black child. This same silence hinders me as I work for those now struggling to navigate their way through our schools and societies. With this study I gain understanding of how my experiences as a Black female learning and teaching in segregated and desegregated classrooms, informs my practice as an administrator. With this understanding, I develop my vision for a school that educates and empowers Black children and find the courage to bring that vision to life.

My search for understanding led to five bodies of literature: (1) the history of education for Black Americans; (2) the contributions of Black women to Black education in America; (3) Critical Race Theory and its implications for educational inquiry; (4) Black Feminist Thought; and (5) Black women writing their lives. I could not understand my educational experiences without understanding the history from which those experiences evolved. An exploration of the history of education for Black Americans became necessary. During that exploration, I was struck by the incredible contributions of Black women and amazed at my own ignorance about those contributions. Here my

interests in Black women's auto/biography and the history of Black education merged as I explored the lives of Black women educators. As my interest in Black education and auto/biography grew, I began to search for a theory, a framework that would respect and honor my experiences within that history while helping me make sense of them. I was drawn to Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought particularly for their use of narratives and counter-narratives to challenge normative beliefs. In this chapter I review each of these bodies of literature.

### **A History of Education for Black Americans**

Two experiences in Dr. Marla Morris' multicultural education course during my first semester as a doctoral student led to my fascination with the history of Black education. I have difficulty recalling which occurred first but, recognize both as pivotal moments. One of the required readings for the course was "Education and schooling: You can have one without the other" (Shujaa, 1994). In this essay, Shujaa contends that while it is possible for schooling, "a process intended to perpetuate and maintain the society's existing power relations and the institutional structures that support" them, and education, "the process of transmitting from one generation to the next knowledge of the values, aesthetics, spiritual beliefs, and all things that give a particular cultural orientation its uniqueness", to overlap most Black Americans leave our public institutions schooled rather than educated (p. 15). Shujaa's argument led me to question my own experiences in public schools and to wonder whether I had been schooled, educated, or if perhaps the processes had overlapped from me.

The second moment seemed a chance occurrence at the time. In retrospect I am less certain that it was. Dr. Morris brought several books into class one night and laid

them out on the table. We were invited to take them if they would be helpful with our research. Two words in one of the titles immediately caught my attention – race and education. Before this class, I had never considered that there might be a relationship between those two words. Knowledge was knowledge, I thought, whether you were Black, white, brown, red, or green. Yet here was this entire book challenging me on that belief. I remember being drawn back to that book over and over again before finally deciding to pick it up. With that choice I began the exploration of Black education and its history that I continue here.

Since the days of slavery, Black Americans have struggled and overcome incredible odds to become educated. By 1860 five percent of the slave population had risked injury and death to become literate (Anderson, 1988). Even before the creation of the Freedmen’s Bureau and the arrival of northern missionaries, newly emancipated slaves established schools for themselves. By 1866, 500 native schools, “common schools founded and maintained exclusively by Blacks”, had been established throughout the South (Anderson, 1988, p. 7). Blacks who could not attend school during the day attended church-sponsored Sabbath schools during the evening and on weekends. In Georgia, former slaves formed the Georgia Educational Association to establish policy and provide financing and supervision for Black schools throughout the state. By the fall of 1866 Blacks in Georgia owned 57 school buildings and were providing financial support for 96 schools across the state.

If the education of Black children had remained in the care of these committed communities the current situation in Black education might be very different. Unfortunately, this would not be the case as northern missionaries and industrialists

gained influence in Black education. In this section, I explore three paradigms of Black education, the goals of those who supported them, and their impact on Black communities. I pay particular attention to the northern industrialists' use of philanthropy to advance their vision for Black education.

Northern missionary societies sent teachers armed with classical liberalism into the south after the Civil War. Their commission – to prepare freed Blacks for assimilation into American society as full citizens (Anderson, 1988). Organizations including the American Missionary Association, the Freedman's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, The American Baptist Home Missionary Society, and the Presbyterian Board of Missions for Freedman focused their attention on higher education for Blacks. Course offerings in schools these societies sustained included philosophy, history, English, natural sciences, mathematics, political science, and languages such as Latin, Greek, and French. Historically Black Colleges including Fisk University, Morehouse College, Meharry Medical College, Spellman Seminary, and Shaw University were established based on this orientation. Their goal was “to prepare a college-bred black leadership to uplift the black masses from the legacy of slavery and the restraints of the postbellum caste system (Anderson, 1988, p. 241). Critics of this orientation included W. E. B. DuBois.

A graduate of Harvard and Fisk Universities, Du Bois (1903/1995) feared classically educated Blacks were gaining limited acceptance into white society at the cost of their connections to Black communities. He also feared that through classical liberalism “the Negro people [were being] wooed ... from a love of knowing, to regard dollars as the be-all and end-all of life” (p. 114). He charged that Black liberal arts

colleges were, in the words of Lee and Slaughter-Defoe (2004), “producing a generation of leaders who were committed to personal wealth rather than to the service and leadership of the masses of their communities” (p. 466). Educator and historian Carter G. Woodson shared DuBois’ concerns.

Woodson (1933/2000) argued that liberalism aimed “to transform the Negroes, not to develop them” (p. 17). He proposed a curriculum that placed the Black race at its center. With underlying themes of “redemption, renewal, integrity, and a sense of community” Afrocentrism seeks to “reconnect African Americans to their spiritual origins” (Watkins, 1993, p. 331). Supporters consider public schools as having failed at their task of educating Black children and criticize reliance on “negative pathological labels ... as the theoretical rationale for educational policymaking” (p. 322). African centered perspectives have been proposed for improving the educational performance of Black students (Akoto, 1994; Bush, 1997; Dove, 1994; Lee, 1992; Lee, 1994; Lomotey, 1992; Rivers & Lomotey, 1998) but seldom find their way into public school classrooms. This is not true for the accommodationist model supported by northern industrialists.

They saw an incredible opportunity with the end of the Civil War. For men such as John D. Rockefeller, J. B. Morgan, and Andrew Carnegie the devastated South was a new market into which they could expand their oil, railroad, textile, and steel industries with little resistance. But first they had to resolve the race problem. General Samuel C. Armstrong’s Hampton idea provided an answer.

The Hampton Idea essentially called for the effective removal of [B]lack voters and politicians from southern political life, the relegation of [B]lack workers to the lowest forms of labor in the southern economy, and the establishment of a

general southern racial hierarchy. [Armstrong] expected that the work of adjusting [B]lacks to this social arrangement would be carried out by... [B]lack... educators. (Anderson, 1988, p. 36)

It is no surprise that northern industrialists were attracted to Armstrong's concept. Blacks in their view had not evolved sufficiently for full participation in American society, especially northern society. Their place, the industrialist believed, was in the South where the climate was better suited to their physiology and temperament. A well trained cadre of teachers would help Blacks accept this "reality". These educators would be trained in schools modeled after Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute which was founded by Armstrong in 1868. At Hampton, Black students with little more than an elementary education were exposed to two years of manual labor, "organized to shape attitudes and build character", strict discipline "to rid the school of students at variance with the Hampton Idea", and elementary academics "planned mainly for the ideological training of potential Hampton missionaries" before being pronounced teachers (p. 49).

Beginning in 1890 the industrialists along with representatives from missionary associations, businessmen, politicians, and educators met in several conferences focusing on education in the South (Watkins, 2001). During the second conference held in Lake Mohonk in the Catskills Mountains, attendees began supporting Armstrong's Hampton Idea and by the end of the third conference held in Winston-Salem, North Carolina in 1901 "participants...recognized that they shared beliefs in universal education, white supremacy, and black industrial training [and] held similar ideas regarding the promotion of public welfare, the training of laboring classes, industrialization, and the efficient

organization of society” (Anderson, 1988, p. 84). This marked the beginning of the Southern Education Movement.

The northern industrialists first turned their attention to Black normal schools. These training institutions offered two or three year programs designed to prepare students as teachers (Anderson, 1988). A secondary education was not required for admission and many times “students arrived with a less than adequate elementary education and successfully completed the normal school program with an education equivalent in quality to that of a fair tenth grade program” (p. 35). The northern industrialists targeted these schools because many were founded by graduates of Hampton and its sister school Tuskegee, they “were not under the control of either missionary societies, [B]lack religious organizations, or federal and state authorities”, and their dependence on voluntary contributions made philanthropic gifts attractive (p. 115). Anderson (1988) discusses the impact of these gifts on Black educational institutions.

Although philanthropic foundations declared it their policy to put no pressure, direct or indirect, upon any institution to conform to a certain course of action, it was well known that northern organizations such as the General Education Board were donating funds almost exclusively to promote the Hampton-Tuskegee model. Hence struggling [B]lack private institutions, especially those not committed to the Hampton-Tuskegee model, found it easier to secure funds from northern industrial philanthropists by trumpeting industrial training than by stressing academic education. (p. 117)

For the northern philanthropists, industrial education formed the foundation for teacher preparation. When schools placed too much emphasis on academics, funds were



discontinued or, as in the case of Fort Valley in Georgia, faculties were redirected to the expected course through training in the Hampton model. Those who refused to be redirected were dismissed.

When it became clear that Black normal schools could not produce the numbers of teachers required to meet demand, northern industrialists began funding county training schools. Anderson (1988) explains,

The basic idea was to establish an industrial boarding school, centrally located in the counties of southern states, with facilities and teachers to operate seven elementary grades and three years of secondary and normal school courses to train industrial teachers for the little county schools. (p. 138)

Working through the General Education Board, John F. Slater Fund, and Anna T. Jeanes Fund, the industrialists provided funds for buildings, salaries, and supervision. By 1931, they were partially supporting 390 County Training Schools throughout the South. These county schools were expected to provide instruction in home economics for Black females, agricultural training for Black males, and teacher training for Black males and females. Local school districts received \$500 per year for teachers' salaries and funds for building industrial shops, homes for teachers and dormitories. In exchange, the foundations required that the school property belong to the state, county, or district and that the schools be recognized as part of the local school system. Local school boards were also required to allocate at least \$750 per year for teachers' salaries. Principals and teachers who had been educated in liberal arts institutions were sent to Hampton and Tuskegee to "learn how to do industrial education the right way" (Anderson, 1988, p. 142). State supervisors responsible for ensuring that the schools were providing the

Hampton-style of industrial education were hired. Although “officially responsible to the state superintendent of education, they took their assignments from the General Education Board” (Anderson, 1988, p. 138). Despite these efforts by the industrialists to control implementation, the Hampton-style curriculum was often subverted by faculties at both the county training schools and normal schools. Caswell County Training School in Yanceyville, North Carolina was one such school (Walker, 1996).

In 1933, N. L. Dillard, teacher/principal of Yanceyville School, called a community meeting to discuss establishing a high school for Blacks. Because a similar request had been denied the year before, the group decided to bypass the local school board and take their request directly to the State Department of Education in Raleigh, North Carolina. The high school received accreditation from the state during the 1934-35 school year and the name was changed the Caswell County Training School. The new name did not reflect the curriculum offered at the school.

The name...belies the educational focus of the new high school. In practice, it was not the teacher-training type...nor was it primarily industrial. Like the white high schools in this rural area, this school offered vocational training in agriculture, but at the same time it offered a liberal arts curriculum that included... the basic subjects required by the state, such as biology, physics, plane geometry, French, and two years of Latin. (Walker, 1996, p. 35-36)

For the faculties of county training schools such as Caswell, the belief in liberal education as a route to self-determination and self-reliance was too deeply embedded to be ignored. Rather than give up their dreams, these educators found spaces for resisting

pressures to convert their schools into true training schools. Black women educators played a pivotal role in that resistance.

### **Black Women's Contributions to Black Education**

While the education of Black women in America has been influenced by each of the paradigms I have discussed, it has also been influenced by perceptions of women's roles in society. These perceptions tend to vary along racial lines. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, postsecondary education for white women served three purposes (Durbine & Kent, 1989). First and foremost it prepared them for marriage. Curriculum focused on domestic science, the fine arts, and foreign languages. Such instruction increased a woman's cultural capital making her a more attractive wife particularly to men in the higher social ranks. For the women who did not marry immediately after high school, postsecondary schools also served as warehouses providing something productive and safe for women to do with their time until marriage. Finally, postsecondary education prepared these women to temporarily enter the labor force, most often as teachers. This employment was expected to terminate with marriage when they would focus all of their time and energy on husband and family.

Many postsecondary schools for Black women provided similar training. Black communities, however, held different expectations for what Black women would do with that training. Economics necessitated that Black women contribute financially to the survival of their families. As a result their participation in the work force was not viewed as temporary. Black women were also encouraged to contribute to the uplift of the Black race from the intellectual and social inferiority that was a consequence of slavery (Logan, 1999). They left their homes for schools such as Fisk University, Atlanta University,

Oberlin College, and Spellman College to become levers for lifting their race (Shaw, 2004). They received industrial training in the domestic arts not just to become domestic servants but to improve the living conditions of Black children. Training in the liberal arts prepared these Black women to become nurses, social workers, and teachers. Following graduation, they were expected to return to their communities as social change agents “in the regeneration and progress of [the Black] race” (Cooper, 1892, p. 23-24). Women like Anna Julia Cooper, Lucy Craft Laney, and Mary McLeod Bethune refused to accept subservience for themselves and their race. They would become pioneers in the education of Black children.

Life at the borders of class and race empowered Anna Julia Cooper to overcome the obstacles she encountered as a Black woman while remaining committed to “the inherent right of every soul to its own highest development” (Cooper cited in Titone and Maloney, 1999, p. 82). Born in 1858, Cooper was the daughter of a slave woman and her white master. She entered St. Augustine’s Normal School and Collegiate Institute in 1868 and graduated in 1871 at the age of 13. Cooper remained at St. Augustine’s as a teacher until 1881 when she entered Oberlin College in Ohio. In 1884, she graduated from Oberlin with a B. A. in mathematics and went on to serve as Professor of Modern Language and Literature at Wilberforce University in Ohio, teacher and principal at M Street Colored High School in Washington, D. C., and as President of Frelinghuysen University, a school for working-class Blacks in Washington, D. C.. Cooper’s academic pursuits climaxed in 1925 when, at the age of sixty-seven, she earned her Ph. D. in Latin from the Sorbonne in Paris, becoming the fourth Black American woman to earn a terminal degree.

Cooper viewed the education of Blacks in general and the education of Black women in particular as key to the advancement of the race toward social equality. “The position of woman in society” Cooper (1892) wrote, “determines the vital elements of [a race’s] regeneration and progress...because it is she who must first form the man by directing the earliest impulses of his character” ( p. 21). The greatest challenge to her commitment to quality education came at M Street High School. During her tenure as principal at M Street she implemented a curriculum that allowed “the opportunity for the same or equivalent work [to] be afforded the colored children of Washington as might be found if they were white” (Cooper as cited in Titone and Maloney, 1999). As a result, M Street graduates were admitted directly into universities including Harvard, Yale, and Brown. Despite such success stories, Cooper’s white supervisor insisted Black students were incapable of success with such a curriculum and insisted that she discontinue her efforts. Cooper refused and eventually the school board, siding with the director dismissed her.

Cooper’s commitment to education for racial uplift was also evident in her work with various civic organizations. In 1897, she served as corresponding secretary for the Washington Colored Women’s League, an organization committed to “the education and improvement of Colored Women and the promotion of their interests” (Fourth Annual Report of the Colored Woman’s League of Washington, D. C., 1897, p. 13). The League’s accomplishments for the prior year included supporting a girl attending Manassas Industrial School and the inauguration of a model kindergarten system as part of a Normal Training class for young ladies. Cooper was also the only woman to hold membership in the American Negro Academy. Founded by scholar and Episcopalian

minister Alexander Crummell, the ANA committed itself to promoting the publication of African American scholarly work related to culture and history.

Some question whether Cooper worked out of concern for others or out of concern for the newly created space in American society for middle class Black women. Unger (2000) asserts that “already assimilated” Black middle class women worried that newly arriving “loud, lewd, and loose” migrant women from the south would increase discrimination and restrictions for all. For such critics, the education Cooper advocated served only to assist Black women in the process of transforming themselves into acceptable American ladies. While this may be true, it does not diminish Cooper’s resistance at M Street High. Her courage in remaining committed to a quality education for Black women and men demonstrates a passion for individual achievement as well as racial uplift.

Educator Lucy Craft Laney also believed in the power of education to lift the Black race. Laney was born in Macon, Georgia in 1854, the seventh of David and Louisa Laney’s ten children. David Laney, an ordained Presbyterian minister, used his carpentry skills to purchase freedom for himself and Louisa. Louisa taught Lucy how to read and enrolled her in Lewis High School, a private school for Blacks, when it opened in 1865. In 1869 Laney entered Atlanta University and four years later, was among the first of its students to receive a degree. Following graduation, Laney taught in several Georgia communities before opening a private liberal arts school for Black children in Augusta, Georgia.

The school, later named Haines Normal and Industrial Institute, became the first public high school for Blacks in the South (Cashin, 1995). While Haines offered

vocational training, emphasis was on the liberal arts. Students studied English, mathematics, history, chemistry, physics, psychology, sociology, French, and German. Special emphasis was placed on educating Black women. “The educated Negro woman” Laney believed, was needed “not [only] in the classroom but as a public lecturer she [would] give advice and knowledge that [would] change a whole community and start its people on the upward way” (Wormser, 2002).

Laney (1897/1999) believed that attempts to lift the Black race through politics, education, or religion were misguided without the added condition of mothering. Within Black communities, the act of mothering has not been limited to those with whom a woman shares a biological bond. Included are “othermothers” in the form of teachers and community members committed to the well-being of all Black children (Collins, 1991, p. 189). Irvine (1999) shares the story of one such teacher.

Mrs. Jones went through a rather interesting naming ritual with her students on the first day of school. ...She gives every child a new hyphenated name at the beginning of the school year. For example, if a child's name is James Smith, Mrs. Jones tells him his new name is James Smith-Jones. When asked why she insists on this renaming ritual, she stated that she wanted the children to know that “You now belong to me and how you act and what you do reflects me.” (p. 250)

With Mrs. Jones “adoption” of her students each year, the classroom becomes a home full of the nurturing and care Laney believed to be essential for racial uplift. Mrs. Jones is not just a teacher. Like Laney, she is an othermother “committed [to] the responsibility of ... making environments for children ... to help develop into a noble man or woman the young [lives] committed to her care” (Laney, 1897, p. 209).

Mary McLeod Bethune began her teaching career under Laney's leadership at Haines Institute. The first free child born to former slaves, Bethune's education began at Emma Wilson's mission school for Black children in South Carolina. Later Bethune attended Scotia Seminary for Black Women in Concord, North Carolina. After graduating, Bethune received a scholarship to Moody Bible Institute. She graduated from Moody in 1895 with hopes of serving as a foreign missionary. Her request was denied and Bethune spent the following year teaching under Lucy Laney.

In 1904, Bethune decided to join Blacks migrating to Florida in search of better living conditions. She opened the Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls. Bethune (1941/1992) wrote,

I opened the doors of my school, with an enrollment of five little girls, aged from eight to twelve, whose parents paid me fifty cents' weekly tuition. My own child was the only boy in the school. Though I hadn't a penny left, I considered cash money as the smallest part of my resources. I had faith in a living God, faith in myself, and a desire to serve... (p. 134)

Less than two years later, enrollment in Bethune's school had increased to 250.

Bethune (1941/1992) preferred to focus her attention on the education of girls because she felt "they especially were hampered by lack of educational opportunities" (p. 138). However, in 1923 the financial struggle to keep the school going became too great and Bethune agreed to merge with Cookman Institute for Boys, the first school of higher education for Blacks in Florida. Today Bethune-Cookman College has an annual enrollment of more than 2500 and offers bachelor's degrees in 40 major fields.



Educators such as Cooper, Laney, and Bethune are not without critics. Carruthers (1994) considers them instruments in the mis-education of the Black elite. He writes,

When the chattel slave system was destroyed by the Civil War, one of the first acts of the victors was to provide for the schooling of Blacks on a wide scale.

Northern industrialists ... began funding and establishing Black colleges. These colleges were intended to sit atop a Negro education system .... The new system depended upon the cultivation of a Black elite to serve as examples for the masses of Blacks and to demonstrate the rewards of obedience. (p. 46)

Carruthers (1994) expresses legitimate concern that the rewards reaped by the “educated elite” were and still are unreachable for the “dis-educated masses” too poorly skilled to compete for well-paying jobs. He ignores, however the possibility that the goals of the Black educators teaching in those institutions may have differed from those of their benefactors. Often Black educators resisted pressure from outside groups to control their schools (Anderson, 1988). They recognized the racism inherent in the assimilationist and accommodationist education missionaries and industrialists were compelling them to implement and found spaces in their curriculums to provide the academic instruction they knew Black students would need.

Educators like Anna Julia Cooper, Lucy Craft Laney, and Mary McCleod Bethune took the call to uplift their race to heart. Their stories remind me that this struggle I find myself engaged in is not a new one. Many before me have triumphed over incredible hardships and successfully engaged in the work of educating Black children. I find courage and hope in their stories. For me, their stories form a counternarrative to the stories of despair and hopelessness so often associated with urban education. The power

of auto/biography, narratives, and counternarratives to challenge oppression by constructing “alternative portraits of reality” draws me to Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 2004, p. 58). Critical Race Theory recognizes that the stories of the oppressed offer a powerful challenge to normative beliefs about their experiences and that their stories can inspire, encourage, and empower others facing similar challenges.

### **Critical Race Theory and Educational Inquiry**

Black education has seldom been structured to meet the needs of Black Americans. Although attempts to do so have been made through multicultural education, anti-racist education, and critical pedagogy, each has limitations. Multiculturalism, a product of the 1960’s Civil Rights movement, aims to 1) “reform the school and other educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equity ..., 2) give male and female students an equal chance to experience educational success and mobility,” and 3) understand “how the interaction of race, class, and gender influences education” (Nieto, 2000, p. 3).

Unfortunately, these goals have seldom been accomplished.

Over time, as more and more people have taken up and used multicultural education, it has come to have a wider and wider array of meanings. In the process, ironically... a good deal of what occurs within the arena of multicultural education today does not address power relations critically, particularly racism.

(Sleeter and Bernal, 2004, p. 240)

For many educators multicultural education means only an appreciation for different cultures. This appreciation they believe is gained by experiencing cultural festivals, food tasting parties, and through the reading of literature with characters from different

cultures. The social justice aspect of multiculturalism is forgotten and the educational needs of Black children continue to be neglected by the institutions charged with educating them.

Attempts have been made to address these concerns by linking multicultural education with other frameworks such as critical pedagogy and anti-racist education (Sleeter and Bernal, 2004). Critical pedagogy, however, does not easily translate into the classroom “often leaving practitioners unclear about what to do” and “does not directly address race, ethnicity, or gender, and as such has a White bias” (p. 13). Anti-racist education is limited by “the term itself” which is viewed by some as reductionist “painting the world in black and white, and leaving too little space for diverse ethnic minorities” and essentialist “giving too little attention to culture and too much attention to race” (p. 35). Given these limitations, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue for the need to move beyond multiculturalism. “The current multicultural paradigm”, they contend

functions in a manner similar to civil rights law. Instead of creating radically new paradigms that ensure justice, multicultural reforms are routinely sucked back into the system and just as traditional civil rights law is based on a foundation of human rights, the current multicultural paradigm is mired in liberal ideology that offers no radical change in the current order. (p. 47)

They offer Critical Race Theory as an alternative. In this section I explore the theoretical roots of Critical Race Theory and its implications for education.

Critical Race Theory scholars recognize Derrick Bell as its “intellectual father figure” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 5). While serving as a professor of law at

Harvard University, Bell challenged the liberal idea of a colorblind legal system as he “developed and taught legal doctrine from a race-conscious viewpoint” (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. xx). Following his resignation from Harvard, students demanded the hiring of a professor of color who could continue Bell’s practice of centering race in the study of law. Citing the lack of qualified minority candidates for the position, school administrators offered instead a three week mini-course on civil rights litigation. Bell’s former students boycotted the mini-course and with the help of outside funding, organized their own course to continue the work they had begun under Bell. The mini-course boycott served as catalyst for the formation of Critical Race Theory.

The ideology underlying Critical Race Theory developed from the scholarship of the Critical Legal Studies movement (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Largely a white male academic organization, Critical Legal Studies began in the late 1970’s and by the late 80’s included a small group of critical scholars of color. While the Critical Legal Studies scholars and the emerging critical race theorists both accepted the “contention that law was neither apolitical, neutral, nor determinate” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xxii) there were points of divergence that eventually lead to Critical Race Theory developing as a separate branch of scholarship. The first centered on Critical Legal Studies’ failure to address racial power.

Critical Legal Studies scholars viewed the law as a legitimizer of hegemonic power while the emerging Critical Race Theory scholars also “understood that race and racism...functioned as central pillars of hegemonic power” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xxii). Second, while both groups believed legal rights “legitimize the social world by

representing it as rationally mediated by the rule of law”, the emerging Critical Race Theorists also saw legal rights as “indeterminate and capable of contradictory meanings” (p. xxiii). As a result, history and context become central when theorizing about race and law. A third point of disagreement centered on the Critical Legal Studies view of “racial outcomes as merely the random consequences of aracial legal processes” (p. xxv).

Critical Race Theorists, however

argued that social interests, and the weight they are accorded, do not exist in advance of or outside the law, but depend on legal institutions and ideology for both their content and form. (p. xxiv)

A final point of difference centered on “the postmodern critique of identity” (xxiv).

While the Critical Race Theorists recognized race as socially constructed they also knew it to be “real in the sense that there is a material dimension and weight to the experience of being ‘raced’ in American society” and therefore race is a legitimate site for analysis (p. xxvi).

In the first Critical Race Theory workshop organized by Kimberle Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, and Stephanie Phillips in 1989, thirty-five legal scholars collaborated “to synthesize a theory that, while grounded in critical theory, was responsive to the realities of racial politics in America” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xxvii). Today, scholars recognize four basic themes of Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). First, racism is an ordinary element of life in America. Second, due to the endemic nature of racism, liberalism is not an effective challenge. Storytelling instead can be a means to “construct a different reality” (p. xvii). Third, interest convergence posits that “white elites will tolerate or encourage racial advances for blacks only when such

advances also promote white self-interest” (p. xvii). Recent examples can be seen in calls to reevaluate the impact of the federal *No Child Left Behind* (2002) legislation only after schools identified as not making adequate yearly progress included predominately white and affluent schools. Finally, Critical Race Theory emphasizes a “call to context” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. xvii) through the use of auto/biography, stories and counter stories.

From these themes, educators have developed themes for a Critical Race Theory of education beginning with recognition of racism as having played a pivotal role in school structure and practices (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). A Critical Race Theory of education “challenges dominant social and cultural assumptions regarding culture and intelligence, language and capability” (p. 4), is committed to a “research agenda that leads toward the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty and the empowering of underrepresented minority groups” (p. 5), and recognizes the legitimacy of the experiential knowledge of women and men of color. Within a Critical Race Theory of education, storytelling, narratives, chronicles, family histories, biographies, and parables become legitimate forms of inquiry. Finally, a Critical Race Theory of education uses interdisciplinary methods to place race and racism in an historical and contemporary context. Educators employing Critical Race Theory in their research include Gloria Ladson-Billings (2003).

In her essay *Lies my teacher still tells: Developing a Critical Race perspective towards Social Studies*, Ladson-Billings (2003) argues that race is a present absence in the profession, curriculum, and policies of social studies. She contends that the field “can serve as a curriculum home for unlearning the racism that has confounded us [as] a

nation” but first the silence must be broken (p. 8). She offers Critical Race Theory as an instrument for breaking the silence.

CRT can serve as an analytic tool to explain the systematic omissions, distortions, and lies that plague the field ...to uncover the systematic way that people of color are discouraged from pursuing careers in the social studies...look, not only at what is present in [policy and position statements], but to ask pointed questions about what is missing. (p. 9-10)

When I consider the role social studies played in the early history of Black education her argument is particularly powerful. It was through the social studies that the northern industrialist sought to shape the minds and characters of Black men and women for subservient roles in American society. Ladson-Billings (2003) proposes Critical Race Theory for creating a narrative that counters this history.

Other researchers suggest that Critical Race Theory has applications for the field of educational leadership as well, particularly for developing leaders who can “transform school from being sorting mechanisms...to being institutions of hope and social change (Lopez, 2003, p. 71). Little has been done however to demonstrate this possibility.

I situate my work within the growing field of those applying Critical Race Theory to education. I use Critical Race Theory and auto/biographical inquiry to explore “the moral and ethical implications and consequences of schooling practices” as they impact my practice as an educational leader (Brown, 2004, p. 89). My work grows out of my passion for providing Black children with an education that empowers them and allows them to be successful in a society that is still racist. As a Critical Race Theory educator, I recognize that schools, like the law, produce racial power. I also recognize that

multicultural paradigms fail to effectively interrupt this production. Using Critical Race Theory and auto/biographical inquiry I further develop my vision for schools that interrupt the production of racial power by empowering Black children with an education for critical consciousness. Black Feminist Thought provides a similar lens for exploring issues of gender.

### **Black Feminist Thought**

While Critical Race Theory encourages me to question the impact of race and racism, Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000; Frazier, Smith, and Smith, 1977; Guy-Sheftall, 1995) encourages me to question how being a Black female growing up and living in America has contributed to my silence. In this section I explore four moments in the development of Black Feminist Thought and the common themes threading through each of those moments.

Those of us who claim a Black Feminist standpoint do not form a monolithic group. We do agree on certain themes revolving around the oppression of Black women (Collins, 2000). We agree that as Black women we inherit a legacy of struggle. From our foremothers of slavery whose very survival was an act of resistance to our current struggles against poverty, racism, sexism, and homophobia, we are familiar with opposition and the struggle for survival. As Black feminist we agree on “the interlocking nature of race, class, and gender, oppression in black women’s personal, domestic, and work lives” (p. 18). We recognize how those in power use negative images of us to make our oppression appear “normal” (Collins, 2000). We also agree that to overcome our oppression “we must assume the responsibility of shattering” those images (Davis,



1995, p. 200) and come to define ourselves, value ourselves, and rely on ourselves (Collins, 2000).

The roots of Black Feminist Thought can be traced to the abolitionist movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Maria W. Stewart, the first Black feminist, called on Black women to “promote and respect ourselves” when no one else will and to “possess the spirit of men, bold and enterprising, fearless and undaunted” (Stewart, 1831/1995, p. 28 – 29). In her calls we hear Black feminist thought themes of self-valuation and self-reliance. Her words also bear witness to the uniqueness of Black women’s experiences in America.

O, ye fairer sisters, whose hands are never soiled, whose nerves and muscles are never strained, go learn by experience! ...Had it been our lot to have been nursed in the lap of affluence and ease, and to have basked beneath the smiles and sunshine of fortune, should we not have naturally supposed that we were never made to toil? (Stewart, 1831/1995, p. 32)

Stewart understood that as Black women we live among intersecting oppressions due to race, gender and economics and that our experiences set us apart from our white counterparts. Sojourner Truth’s words voiced similar understandings.

Dat man ober dar say dat womin needs to helped into carriages and lifted ober ditches, and to hab de best place everywhar. Nobody eber helps me into carriages, or ober mud puddles, or gibbs me any best place! And an’t I a woman? (Truth, 1851/1995, p. 36)

Truth clearly articulates an understanding of Black women oppression due to race and gender. She calls white men on their refusal to acknowledge our place as women and as

human beings. These early Black feminist laid the foundation for generations of Black women who fought for equality on behalf of their race and their sex.

Club women continued the struggle. Educator Anna Julia Cooper (1892) recognized the Black woman “is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem” (p. 45). Mary Church Terrell (1904/1995) spoke to the “colored women with ambition and aspiration handicapped on account of their sex, but ... almost everywhere baffled and mocked because of their race” (p. 64) and pointed out “the immorality of colored women” as a misrepresentation (p. 65). Elise Johnson McDougald (1925) challenged the derogatory and controlling image of “Aunt Jemimas” which “proclaim only an ability to serve, without grace or loveliness” (p. 80). While neither of these women would have labeled themselves Black feminist, they each spoke to the themes of the Black feminist consciousness.

Like the first wave of feminism which grew out of the abolitionist movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the next moment was connected to a larger social movement, the modern Civil Rights movement (Taylor, 1998). Amy Jacques Garvey spoke to the global nature of sexism through her condemnation of Turkish harems (Garvey, 1995) while civil rights activist Frances Beale (1970) trace the cause of Black women’s “double jeopardy” to capitalism’s need “to reduce women to a state of enslavement” (p. 146).

The development of an “explicitly feminist discourse” (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, xvi) marks a third moment in the development of Black Feminist Thought. Among those contributing to this moment were bell hooks, Barbara Smith, and Patricia Hill Collins. Hooks (1984) redefines feminism as “a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture” (p. 26). Smith (1995) explored the myths “black men,

with the collaboration of some black women” developed in an “effort to keep [Black women] from organizing autonomously and from organizing with other women around women’s political issues” (p. 255). Collins (2000) delineates four core themes that “characterize U. S. Black women’s group knowledge or standpoint” (p. 26). These themes, “multifaceted legacies of struggle” (p. 26), “intersecting oppressions, ...replacing derogated images of Black womanhood with self-defined images, ...Black women’s activism as mothers, teachers, and Black community leaders, and ... sensitivity to sexual politics” (p. 27), provide a framework for what counts as Black feminist theory.

The current moment in Black feminist theorizing focuses attention on the legal problems of Black women (Taylor, 2001). Examples include Caldwell’s (1991) *A Hair Piece: Perspectives on the Interaction of Race and Gender*, and Austin’s (1989) *Sapphire Bound!* Caldwell (1991) weaves the narrative of *Rogers v. American Airlines*, the case of a Black women claiming the airline’s policy prohibiting the wearing of braided hairstyles discriminated against her as a Black woman, with her own as a Black braid wearing law professor. Austin (1989) declares,

the time has come for us to get truly hysterical, to take on the role of ‘professional Sapphires...to declare that we are serious about ourselves, and to capture some of the intellectual power and resources that are necessary to combat the systematic denigration of minority women. (p. 3)

Using the case *Chambers v. Omaha Girls Club*, she explores Black women’s resistance to denigrating images and efforts to interfere in their reproductive lives.

“Unlike any other movement, black feminism provides the theory that clarifies the nature of black women’s experience, makes possible positive support from other black

women, and encourages political action that will change the very system that has put us down” (Smith, 1995, p. 262). As a Black woman, I live at the intersection of multiple and overlapping oppressions. I struggle against a white hegemony, both male and female, that would label me as mammy, Jezebel, welfare queen. I struggle against my Black brothers who label me Bitch, ghetto ‘ho, traitor of my race. If I am poor I struggle against capitalism’s failure to honor my labor power. If I am lesbian, I struggle against all who view my sexuality as other than normal. As a Black woman, I chose to resist all who attempt to name me and through the act of auto/biography define my self for myself. I join a legacy of Black women who find themselves by writing their lives.

### **Black Women Writing Their Lives**

In 1996 I became engrossed in Oprah Winfrey’s book club. I realize now that as I made meaning of text such as Toni Morrison’s (1977) *Song of Solomon*, Jane Hamilton’s (1988) *The Book of Ruth*, Sheri Reynold’s (1995) *The Rapture of Canaan*, and Lolita Tademy’s (2001) *Cane River* I was developing an interest in narrative writing. My interest developed further during the summer of 2002. That semester I enrolled in Critical Reading in Curriculum Studies with Dr. Ming Fang He. “The focus [was] on the power of narrative as a means to make sense of the lived world, ...create bridges between worlds other than our own, [and] to see ourselves in the stories of others” (He, 2002, course syllabus). One of the assignments was to write an auto/biographical paper which we then read aloud to our classmates. Through this sharing I gained a new appreciation for the richness of my own story as a Black woman living and learning in America.

In spite of that experience, I initially considered using ethnography as the methodology for exploring my questions around Black students and their experiences in

schools. Janesick (1991) defines ethnography as “the work of describing and explaining a given culture at a particular point in time” (p. 101). Within the field of curriculum, ethnographers engage questions concerning educational policy, curriculum and classroom practices through observations and interviews. While this approach was appropriate for my study there were limitations to consider. As an ethnographer studying a group I am a member of, I would risk taking for granted observations relevant to my study. A second issue was that of power. I was at the time working as an assistant principal in the school where I was planning to conduct my study. Because of my position of authority, students, parents, and teachers may have felt compelled to respond and participate in a manner they believed would please me. A third concern became apparent during my oral candidacy exam. I was asked to elaborate on a concept I discussed in my written response to one of the questions. Suddenly I was again a painfully shy 11-year-old standing in front of her sixth grade class desperately struggling to fill five minutes of an oral book report. But the thoughts will not come. I am silenced by my own fear. Ethnography did not have the power to help me find my voice. Auto/biography did.

The intellectual roots of auto/biographical inquiry can be traced to John Dewey’s views of experience as both personal and social. Dewey also believed there is continuity to experience – present experiences grow out of past experiences and lead to future experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Auto/biography has been used as a form of inquiry in a number of fields including nursing (Hagemaster, 1992), psychology (Richeson & Thorson, 2002; Schutz, 1998), sociology (Friedman, 1990; Stanley, 1993); anthropology (Bateson, 1989; Behar, 1996; Morris, 1994; Cole, 1992), feminist studies, (Heilman, 1988; Neuman & Peterson, 1997; Personal narratives group, 1989).

As a form of curriculum inquiry auto/biography explores the past in order to find solutions to problems in the present. From the present, the auto/biographer regresses into the past. She uncovers personal and communal experiences absent from consciousness but present in actions. She then progresses into the future engaging “fantasies of what might be” (Pinar, 2004, p. 55) and examines both past and future to better understand the present. Along the way the auto/biographer reconstructs the self for “engaged action...in the social reconstruction of the public sphere” (p. 37). To count as inquiry however, these auto/biographies must go a step further. Personal stories must be placed within a historical context and personal issues connected to social concerns (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001). While the emphasis on one or the other shifts during various periods, the connection between the personal and the political has always been visible in Black women’s writings about their lives. In this section, I will explore the history of Black women writing auto/biography and their use of auto/biography as a form of curriculum inquiry.

The story of Black women writing about their lives begins with the publishing of Jarena Lee’s (1836/2003) spiritual auto/biography *The life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, a Colured Lady, Giving Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel* (Andrews, 2003). Lee provides a brief summary of her birth and early life and then shares the struggles and triumphs of her religious journey. This theme of journey is a recurring one in Black narratives (McDowell, 1980). While the Black male’s journey typically “takes him underground” and “is primarily political and social...the Black female’s journey...though touching the political and social, is basically a personal and psychological journey” (p. 157). The Black woman’s journey is an internal one marked

by suffering and a “determination not just to endure but to triumph” over personal and social adversities (Andrews, 1988, p. xxx). In this section, I trace the history of Black women writing their lives as I explore the social and personal issues Black women choose to interrogate in their auto/biographical writing and the themes of journey, suffering, and triumph.

Almost 30 years after Lee’s auto/biography Harriet Jacob’s (1861/2000) *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* became the first slave narrative authored by a Black woman to be published (Andrews, 2003). Writing under the name Linda Brent, Jacobs (1861/2000) declares

I have not written my experiences in order to attract attention to myself; on the contrary, it would have been more pleasant to me to have been silent about my own history. Neither do I care to excite sympathy for my own sufferings. But I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the north to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse. I want to add my testimony to that of abler pens to convince the people of the Free States what Slavery really is. (p. xviii)

Her powerful testimony not only convinces, it breaks the heart.

Jacobs was born in North Carolina to mulatto parents who were slaves. Her father was a carpenter and “on condition of paying his mistress two hundred dollars a year, and supporting himself, was allowed to work at his trade, and manage his own affairs” (p. 1). Father, mother, Jacobs, and her younger brother William lived together in relative comfort with grandmother nearby. It was not until her mother’s death that Jacobs, then 6 years old realized she was a slave. Jacobs (1861/2000) writes

When I was six years old, my mother died; and then, for the first time, I learned by the talk around me, that I was a slave. My mother's mistress...was [her] foster sister...they were both nourished at my grandmother's breast...They played together as children; and when they became women, my mother was a most faithful servant to her white foster sister. On her death-bed her mistress promised that her children should not suffer for anything. (p. 3)

After her mother's death, the mistress kept her promise moving Jacobs and William into her home. Life continued comfortably for them until their mistress's death six years later. Jacobs was willed to the mistress's five year old niece, the daughter of Dr. Flint. It was in his home that her struggles truly began.

Flint was attracted to the adolescent Harriet and tormented her with his sexual advances. Eventually, Jacobs gave herself to another white man hoping Flint would be so angry he would sell her to him. Her gentleman friend she believed would then set her free. Despite the relationship and the two children that resulted from it, Flint's advances only intensified. Jacobs then decided to go into hiding. Her absence she believed would encourage Flint to sell the children to their father. Once he gave up his search for her, Jacobs would join them. For almost seven years she hid in a space above her grandmother's house just nine feet long by seven feet wide and three feet high. After being discovered by an unsympathetic slave girl, Jacobs left her hiding place and escaped to the north. Jacob's story, written as a contribution to the Abolitionist Movement, serves as a testament to the courage and determination of Black women acting on behalf of Black children.



Harriet Wilson's (1859/2003) auto/biography offers similar testimony. Wilson, like Jacobs, begins *Our Nig; or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a Two Story White House, North* by declaring her purpose for writing.

Deserted by kindred, disable by health, I am forced to some experiment which shall aid me in maintaining myself and child without extinguishing this feeble life. I would not from these motives even palliate slavery at the south, by disclosures of its appurtenances North. (Wilson, 1859/2003, p. 143)

Wilson wants her readers to understand she does not intend to distract from the work of those opposing the conditions of southern Blacks living in slavery. If her circumstances were different she would not be writing her story. Deserted by her husband, she is forced to write her story to support herself and her child. She sees no other means for survival.

At six years old Wilson was abandoned by her white mother and Black stepfather and left in the care of the Bellmonts. Wilson's life with the Bellmonts was extremely difficult for a six year old child. Each day began with feeding the hens and driving the cattle to pasture followed by a breakfast of milk and bread crumbs, taken while standing in the kitchen. There were dishes to be washed after the noonday meal and afternoon tea and the day ended with her bringing the cows back home. Most unbearable was the mental and physical abuse she suffered. The one bright spot in her life came when Mr. Bellmont insisted she attend school. Wilson's life with the Bellmonts was brutal but the message she leaves with readers is that she survived struggles with abandonment and abuse and continues to survive through the writing of her story.

In *Behind the Scenes: or Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House*, Elizabeth Keckley (1868/1989) tells her story of rising from slave to dressmaker

and friend to Mrs. Mary Todd Lincoln. Keckley was born to slave parents in Dinwiddie, Virginia. Her father, a slave from a nearby plantation, was separated from the family when Keckley was young. At 14 Keckley was sent to live with her master's oldest son, a minister, and his wife. Encouraged by his wife, Minister Burwell attempts to "subdue what he called [Keckley's] 'stubborn pride'" (Keckley, 1868/1989, p. 36). Five times Keckley was beaten and five times she fought back. She was also repeatedly raped by a regular visitor to the home. She shares very little with readers about this other than it resulted in the birth of her only child.

Keckley later returned to Virginia to serve the daughter of the elder Mr. Burwell. The family was extremely poor and Keckley was forced to hire out her services as a seamstress to support them all. In 1860 she purchased freedom for herself and her child and moved to Washington, D. C. where she became well known as an excellent dressmaker. Those skills lead to a friendship with Mrs. Lincoln that began during Lincoln's first inauguration as president and continued after his death.

Keckley's triumph, remarkable on its own, appears even more so when contrasting her life with Mrs. Lincoln's. During Lincoln's presidency Mrs. Lincoln accumulated considerable debt. Following his death, Mrs. Lincoln, living in near poverty, was forced to sell much of the wardrobe Keckley's skills had helped her accumulate. Those same skills ensured Keckley's survival and independence throughout her life.

"Whereas the slave narrators" such as Keckley and Wilson "were determined to fight a social system", the next generation of Black women's auto/biography consists of stories "intent on examining those problems which made it difficult to forge a unified

black identity” (Weixlman, 1990, p. 382). A theme of triumph over adversity can still be found in Black women’s auto/biographies in this period including Ida B. Wells’ (1972) *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* and Charlotte L. Forten’s (1864) *Life on the Sea*.

Ida B. Wells (1972) explains in the preface to *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, why she chose to share her story. She begins by telling readers about her meeting with a young Black woman. The woman was asked to name a person that reminded her of Joan of Arc. She named Wells but could not explain why. Wells goes on to say,

When she told me she was twenty-five years old, I realized that one reason she did not know was because the happenings about which she inquired took place before she was born. Another was that there was no record from which she could inform herself. I then promised to set it down in writing so those of her generation could know how the agitation against the lynching evil began... (p. 4)

This same desire to ensure others were informed motivated Wells’ crusade against lynching.

Wells was born into slavery in Holly Springs, Mississippi in 1862 the oldest of eight children. Education was a priority in the Wells’ household. “Our job,” Wells (1972) wrote, “was to go to school and learn all we could” (p. 9). Her father served on the board of trustees for Shaw University, a school established in Holly Springs by the Freedmen’s Aid Society. Wells’ mother accompanied her children to school until she also learned to read and then visited regularly to monitor their progress.

At the age of 14, Wells lost both her parents and an infant sibling to Yellow Fever. To support herself and five younger siblings she secured a position as teacher in a country school. Wells (1972) wrote,

I then found a woman who had been an old friend of my mother's to stay...with the children while I went out ... to teach. I came home every Friday afternoon, riding the six miles on the back of a big mule. I spent Saturday and Sunday washing and ironing and cooking for the children and went back to my country school on Sunday afternoon. (p 17)

The following year Wells and her two youngest siblings moved to Memphis, Tennessee to live with an aunt.

Once in Memphis, Wells secured another teaching position at a school in Shelby County. One day while making the trip by train to her school, she was ordered out of her seat in the Ladies' car. She refused and was physically dragged from the seat. Rather than sit in the assigned smoking car, Wells left the train at the next station, returned to Memphis and secured a lawyer to file suit against the railroad company. After winning in circuit court, her case, the first involving a Black plaintiff appealed to a state court after the repeal of the Civil Rights Act, was lost on appeal.

While living in Memphis, Wells was elected editor of the journal *Evening Star* and began writing for the weekly *Living Way*. Wells (1972) explained,

I had an instinctive feeling that the people who had little or no school training should have something coming into their homes weekly which dealt with their problems in a simple, helpful way. So in weekly letters to the *Living Way*, I wrote in a plain, common-sense way on the things which concerned our people. (p. 23)

Soon Wells' pieces were appearing in Black newspapers across the country. Her success as a writer however would end her teaching career.

In 1889 Wells' published a piece in the *Free Speech and Headlight* criticizing conditions in local Black schools. As a result she was not reelected to her teaching position. Wells decided at that point to pour all of her energy into writing. Nine months later she wrote, "I had an income nearly as large as I had received teaching and felt sure that I had found my vocation" (p. 39). It was not long after this that the father of Wells' godchild and two other Black residents of Memphis were lynched and Wells' journalistic crusade against lynching began.

Unlike Wells, Charlotte L. Forten was born into a family of privilege. Her grandfather was a wealthy sail maker. Her mother, the former Mary Virginia Wood, was a founding member of the Philadelphia Female Anti-slavery Society. Her father, Robert Bridges Forten, was a mathematician, orator, and activist. Because he objected to the segregated schools of Philadelphia, Charlotte was educated by private tutors until she was 16. She was then sent to Salem, Massachusetts where she attended the integrated Higginson Grammar School. She entered Salem Normal School after graduating, and after completing her studies there accepted a teaching position at the former all-white Epes Grammar School.

In 1862 Forten traveled to Port Royal, St. Helena Island South Carolina to join the effort to educate newly freed slaves. In *Life on the Sea Islands* Forten (1864) explores her time in South Carolina. She writes,

I never before saw children so eager to learn...Coming to school is a constant delight and recreation to them. The older ones, during the summer, work in the

fields from early morning until eleven or twelve o'clock, and then come into school...as bright and as anxious to learn as ever...Many of the grown people are desirous of learning to read. It is wonderful how a people who have been so long crushed to the earth...can have so great a desire for knowledge, and such a capability for attaining it. One cannot believe that the haughty Anglo-Saxon race, after centuries of such an experience as these people have had, would be very much superior to them. And one's indignation increases against those who...taunt the colored race with inferiority while they themselves use every means in their power to curse and degrade them... (Forten, 1864/2003, p. 371)

Forten's published diary accounts "offered white middle-class readers a positive assessment of the potential of the former slaves while testifying to the success of interracial cooperation in social reform and missionary work" (Andrews, 2003, p. 363). Her journal also testified to Fortens's struggles as the first Black teacher on the Sea Islands. "Her background...sometimes limited her rapport with the Sea Islanders. Her relationships with...white colleagues, at the same time, were circumscribed by the racism that she suspected even some of the most well-disposed among them harbored" (Gates and Higginbotham, 2004, p. 362).

Fortens's and Well's stories focused on their personal struggles against the social problems that stood in the way of racial uplift. During a third period, auto/biographical writing by Black women focused on their struggles against personal adversities. Auto/biography became "a route of potential wholeness" (Braxton, 1989, p. 140) as Black women wrote about their experiences in order to gain understanding of their lives. While the emphasis shifted from the social to the personal the connection between the

two remains evident in these women's writings. Among them are Zora Neale Hurston and Meta Y. Harris.

Hurston's love of stories began on the porches of Eatonville, Florida. One of eight children born to John and Lucy Hurston, Zora loved to listen to the stories told by visitors to the Hurston home and by the men who sat on the porch of the local store.

Hurston (1942/1984) writes,

For me, the store porch was the most interesting place that I could think of...I would hear an occasional scrap of gossip in what to me was adult double talk, but which I understood at times...But what I really loved to hear was the menfolks...straining against each other in telling folk tales...I often hung around and listened while Mama waited on me for the sugar or coffee to finish off dinner until she lifted her voice over the tree tops in a way to let me know that her patience was gone (p. 62-64)

She weaves these stories throughout her auto/biography *Dust Tracks on the Road* (1942/1984), providing a cultural context that would otherwise be lost.

Hurston grew up in Eatonville, Florida, the first all Black town in the United States. Her father, John Hurston, was a sharecropper from Macon County, Alabama and was drawn to Eatonville by the hopes of a better life. He moved his family including 3 year old Hurston to Florida and eventually became mayor of Eatonville.

Hurston was considered "impudent and given to talking back" (p. 21) as a child, characteristics her father was sure would lead her to an early death. Her mother was more tolerant, not wanting Hurston "to be a mealy-mouthed rag doll by the time [she] got grown" (p. 21). Mrs. Hurston also tolerated Zora's storytelling despite encouragement

from her mother to “wear out a handful of peach hickories on her back-side” for telling stories she believed to be just lies (p. 72).

Hurston was 9 years old when her mother died. After the burial, she was sent to Jacksonville to attend school with an older brother and sister. It was in Jacksonville that she first encountered racism.

Jacksonville made me know that I was a little colored girl. Things were all about the town to point this out to me. Streetcars and stores and then talk I heard around the school. I was no longer among the white people whose homes I could barge into with a sure sense of welcome. (p. 94)

These experiences made a lasting impression on Zora but did not curb her boldness.

When Hurston’s education was cut short by her father’s financial difficulties, she was sent back to Eatonville and spent the next five years living with friends and relatives. While living with her brother and his family she was hired as maid to a member of a traveling theatrical troupe. Eighteen months later, her employer decided to marry and Hurston was left alone in Baltimore.

She eventually entered Morgan College and completed her high school education. She then traveled to Washington and entered Howard University but again financial troubles interrupted her studies. She traveled to New York and with the help of friends received a scholarship to Bernard University. It was at Bernard that Hurston discovered her passion for anthropology. Following graduation, Hurston returned to the south with a fellowship to collect the Black folklore she loved so much as a child.

Scholars criticize Hurston’s auto/biography for “its apparent unreliability, its inconsistency” with what is known about her life, “and its seemingly assimilationist



racial politics” (Walker, 1998, p. 387). Hemenway (1984) in his introduction to *Dust Tracks on a Road* accuses Hurston of sacrificing “truth to the politics of racial harmony” (p. xiii). Hemenway adds,

*Dust Tracks* fails as autobiography because it is a text deliberately less than its author’s talents, a text diminished by her refusal to provide a second or third dimension to the flat surfaces of her adult image. Hurston avoided any exploration of the private motives that led to her public success. (p. xxxix)

But *Dust Tracks* is the story Hurston chooses to tell and it tells of her triumph over adversities, both personal and social.

“Writing autobiography” Harris (2003) explains, “gives me the opportunity not only to explore my history from a personal perspective, relative to the political happenings of the times, local happenings, Black community events, academic expressions, and other occurrences that somehow impinge on my life, but also to revisit those times from a ‘removed perspective’”(p. 36). In “Black women writing autobiography: Marginalisation, migration, and self-identity” Harris (2003) visits the lives of five Black women, including her own, and explores autobiography “as a tool of empowerment” (p. 13).

Born in northwest Alabama in the 1950’s, Harris grew up in the midst of poverty and racism. She writes, “I determined to leave early in life because of the hatred and bigotry that is as rich in that part of the country, as the soil is black” (p. 97). At the age of sixteen, she migrated to Pennsylvania and spent the last two years of high school living with a white family as an exchange student. Although this was a positive experience,

“because of the racial make-up of the environment” (p. 126), after graduating Harris (2003) felt she “needed to move back into a Black community” (p. 126).

She migrated again, this time to Washington, D. C. where she enrolled in Howard University. “Where Pennsylvania had prepared me academically”, Harris (2003) notes, “Howard prepared me socially and sharpened me intellectually” (p. 127). After graduating from Howard, Harris (2003) enrolled in the predominately white Georgetown University Law Center and “once again...was in a predominantly White environment and facing gender, race and class issues head-on” (p. 127). Eventually she migrated abroad.

These migrations would provide no relief from the marginalization Harris (2003) experienced as a Black female. She explains,

There are in every society the crude and uncivilized who do not hesitate to reveal themselves. I have not found a land where I have not experienced bigotry based on race or gender, or in my case both, because I cannot separate them in myself. I am always both, a woman and Black (p. 129).

Although migration offered no relief, Harris (2003) was able to create a strong, empowered self that would ensure her survival. She writes, “I have given myself permission to ignore the protests against me, and my personhood, and to fight with all that is in me, to overcome those overt and covert obstacles” (p. 93).

Recent auto/biographies such as civil rights activist Dorothy Height’s (2003) *Open Wide the Freedom Gates* may mark a new generation in Black women writing their lives as the focus seems to shift back toward the social. Height (2003) writes to fill gaps in the history of the Civil Rights movement. Yet the themes of journey, struggle, and triumph can still be heard as she shares her story.

Dorothy Height was born in 1912 in Richmond, Virginia but grew up in culturally diverse Rankin, Pennsylvania. Her father, James Height, was a self-employed building contractor and an active member of the Republican Party. Her mother, Fannie Burroughs Height, worked as a nurse in Richmond's Black hospital but following the family's move Rankin was forced into household work. Northern hospitals would not hire a Black nurse. Mrs. Height was also an active member of the Pennsylvania Federation of Colored Women's Clubs and insisted that Dorothy accompany her to the club meetings, an experience that would later impact her work as an activist.

Dorothy's call to activism came at the age of 12. Representatives of the Pittsburgh Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) arrived in Rankin to establish a youth program. Dorothy was eventually elected president of the club and was encouraged to participate in the citywide meetings held in downtown Pittsburgh. She would soon learn that her acceptance into the YWCA was limited. Height (2003) describes the painful event.

Several of us decided to go to the Chatham Street YWCA in downtown Pittsburgh and learn how to swim. When we arrived, we marched up to the front desk to ask for directions to the pool, and as we spoke the woman behind the desk got a curious look on her face. She told us that Negro girls could not swim in the YWCA pool. I was only twelve years old. I had never heard of "social action" nor seen anyone engaged in it, but I barely took a breath before saying that I would like to see the executive director. Though she received us graciously, the director held to the policy....nothing I said made any difference. Young women of color were not welcome in the Chatham Street YWCA pool. (p. 18)

Dorothy would later become a member of the national YWCA staff and work to end racist practices at all levels in the organization. She would go on to actively engage in the Civil Rights movement, working alongside men such as A. Phillip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, James Farmer from the Congress of Racial Equality, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Height (2003) is well aware of the marginalization of women's efforts within the Civil Rights movement. She was the only woman of the leadership group and the only volunteer. All of the men were employees of their organization. During the 1963 march on Washington, she was seated on the platform "a little more than an arm's length from where Dr. King spoke" (p. 145) yet after much discussion among the men, appeals to include a female speaker were declined. "Mahalia Jackson, who sang the national anthem, was the only female voice" heard (p. 145). Height refused to allow such incidents of discrimination to interfere with the work she knew had to be done. The next year she would work with other women, Black and white, in support of Freedom Summer, an effort to register voters and establish freedom schools in Mississippi.

Dorothy Height writes to fill the gaps in the history of the Civil Rights movement. Other Black women are exploring auto/biography as a form of curriculum inquiry. As a form of curriculum inquiry, auto/biography is rooted in the reconceptualization of curriculum studies. As the focus of the field shifted from "the development and management" of curricula to "understanding of educational experience" in and out of schools, a different method of inquiry was needed (Pinar, 1999, p. 484).

We "story the self" as a means of making sense of new conditions of working and being. The self becomes a reflexive project, an ongoing narrative project. To

capture this emergent process requires a modality close to social history, social geography, and social theory – mode which capture the self in time and space, a social cartography of the self. (Goodson, 1998, p. 3)

As a form of curriculum inquiry, auto/biography involves “reflexive analysis” (Grumet, 1999, p. 24) of educational experiences in and out of schools, always with the goal of contributing to the educational experiences of others.

With auto/biography, curriculum becomes “an on-going project of self-understanding” (Pinar, 2004, p. 37). As a process it begins with an acknowledgement of “the nightmare that is the present” (p. 5). The nightmare may be an absence such as Morris’ (2001) “educative and familial” absence of the Holocaust (p. 3), or a silence such as the one around “race talk in the study of history and the social sciences in our schools” (Ladson-Billings, 2004, p. 10), or the state of education for Black Americans addressed in my own work.

Three streams of auto/biographical inquiry can be traced through the field of education (Smith, 1998). Within the first stream are those who explore teachers’ lives (Ball & Goodson, 1985; Goodson, 1992) in order to “change both the teachers themselves and the educational system of which they are a part” (Smith, 1998, p. 215). A second stream includes those with alternative visions for education (Ashton-Warner, 1963; Neill, 1960). A third stream involves teachers using action research to reflect on their own practice (Elliott, 1991). With my work I seek to contribute to a fourth stream which remains underdeveloped. While Brown (2004) proposes auto/biography as one strategy for “preparing leaders committed to social justice and equity (p. 77), little work

has been done in this area. My study demonstrates the use of auto/biography to develop such leaders.

From the present, auto/biographer inquirers regresses into the past, uncovering personal and communal experiences that while absent from consciousness are present in actions, and progresses into the future engaging their “fantasies of what might be” (Pinar, 2004, p. 55). The writer examines past and future to better understand the present and reconstructs the self for “engaged action...in the social reconstruction of the public sphere” (p. 37). The work of Morris (2001) and He (2003) provide excellent examples.

In *Curriculum and the Holocaust: Competing Sites of Memory and Representation* Morris (2001) explores educative and familial silence around her Jewish ancestry and the Holocaust. Morris (2001) begins her story in the present as she proclaims the impact of this silence on her life.

The memory of Auschwitz ...has become lodged in my psyche. It is the profound silence, both educative and familial, that has marked me...has called me. ...The invocation I hear...demands a response. ...I offer up this study as a... response ... [as] a public testimony of an academic struggling to grapple with the Holocaust ... [and] as a private testimony to my ancestors. (p. 3)

Her work regresses into the past examining representations of the Holocaust in both historical texts and historical novels. Using psychoanalytic theory as a lens, she interprets these works and progresses into the future to offer a dystopic curriculum to counter the utopian thinking that breeds horrors such as the Holocaust. Morris (2001) explains,

Recovering Holocaust memory is guided by what I call a dystopic curriculum. A dystopic curriculum allows interferences, otherness, alterity, and strangeness to emerge out of the different sites of representation. Under the sign of a dystopic curriculum, memories emerge not as a promise of hope, but as a testament to despair and truthfulness. (p. 9)

Utopian thinking seeks perfection. That which does not meet standard is left behind; dismissed. “Dystopia is a way of looking suspiciously at [the] happy texts, happy histories, and happy memories” that hide such dismissals and the absences they create (p. 199).

While Morris (2001) proposes a new perspective on curriculum, He (2003) offers a new method for understanding how living across multiple cultures impacts teachers’ identities. *A River Forever Flowing: Cross-Cultural Lives and Identities in the Multicultural Landscape* explores the lives of three Chinese women navigating language and cultural barriers in China and Canada.

She begins her story in the present as she, Wei, and Shiao prepare dinner for a gathering of Chinese scholars. He (2003) explains,

There, Chinese students cooked together and told one another stories of what had happened in China, what was happening in our lives, and what might happen in the future. We shared our feelings about what it means to be Chinese, and what it means to be Canadian. We found that wherever we go, we always feel strange and different. (p. 1 – 2)

After that initial encounter, the women continued to meet and explore their feelings of belonging, loss, and change. Regressing into the past, they explore their lives in China

during the Anti-Rightist Movement, the Great Leap Forward, and the Grand Cultural Revolution. To gain understanding of their experiences He (2003) builds on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) work with narrative inquiry and offers cross-cultural narrative inquiry.

Unlike traditional research methods which "block thinking by categorizing... experiences and stereotyping enculturation and acculturation processes" (He, 2003, p. 120), cross-cultural narrative inquiry encourages understanding of experiences in multiple cultures. It offers a method for educational researchers who wish to delve into "the ways in which their personal histories, cultures and experiences affect who they are, how they perceive the world, and how they interact with others" (p. xix) that is contextualized, historicized, and reflects the ambiguity of cross-cultural lives.

This process of auto/biographical inquiry did not originate in curriculum studies. It can be seen in Black women's auto/biography from Harriet Jacobs' (1861/2000) *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* written "to arouse the women of the north to a realizing sense of the condition of ...women at the South" (p. xviii) through Dorothy Height's (2003) writing of *Open Wide Freedom's Gate* so that the young might "absorb the lessons of the past" and find "the courage and energy to make it through" (p. 295).

In *Black women writing autobiography: Marginalisation, migration, and self-identity*, Harris (2003) explores the reading and writing of autobiography "as a tool of empowerment" (p. 13). Drawing on theories of Black female autobiography, she develops the following criteria for analyzing the autobiographies of the Black women studied in her work.



- 1) Why each of the selected authors writes her autobiography, and how she perceives and describes herself in general, relative to her birth community, and relative to the communities in which she has, or does live. (p. 90)
- 2) What are the kinds of migrations that these women make, their reasons for migrating, and the lessons that result from their migrations?
- 3) How does writing her autobiography seem to affect the writer's self-identity, and how does she locate herself within her text? (p. 91)
- 4) How does the writer perceive herself as marginalised?
- 5) Do the writers employ other writing genres within their autobiographical texts, and are those devices obvious to the researcher; and, are the uses of these devices deliberate, by the writer?

Harris (2003) then applies her criteria to a close reading of her own story and those of four other contemporary Black women, Amryl Johnson (1988) from the Caribbean, Marita Golden (2002) from the United States, Eva Chipenda (1996), and Buchi Emecheta (1986) both from Africa.

Each of these women lived “trans-national, trans-cultural, and trans-migratory histories” and “depict in their autobiographies some of their experiences as marginalized individuals” (p. 21). She concludes that while her study “does not propose that the practice of autobiography is a cure-all for the negative experiences associated with marginalization...it does present it as one very effective tool for grasping control of one's life and pointing it in the direction that the writer wants to go” (p. 279 – 280). Harris (2003) demonstrates that Black women's writings about their lives are imbued with meaning and purpose beyond simply telling a story. She and other Black women

educators are drawing on their culture and history as they use auto/biography to explore their experiences. Among those using auto/biography to understand educational experiences are Lorene Cary (1991), bell hooks' (1996), and Sandra Nettles' (2001).

In *Black Ice* Cary (1991) shares her story of attending formerly all white and all male St. Paul's Preparatory School in Concord, New Hampshire. She begins on graduation day at St. Paul's in 1989. It is her last graduation as trustee at the school where she has been student and teacher. As she sits on the platform, Cary regresses into the past questioning how her experiences at St. Paul's shaped who she was and who she came to be.

Cary's early years were spent in West Philadelphia. Later her father, a high school teacher, relocated the family to the relatively middle class Black suburb of Yeadon where she attended Yeadon High School. The opportunity to attend St. Paul's came through a neighbor who had heard the school was interested in recruiting Black girls. She put Cary in touch with an alumnus and after an application and interview process Cary joined the class of 1974.

Cary's time at St. Paul's was challenging. She struggled with accepting the education St. Paul's had to offer while maintaining her Blackness, especially her connection to family, friends, and the Black community. Like Ming Fang, Shiao, and Wei (He, 2001), Cary feels she no longer belongs in West Philadelphia yet she is still an outsider in the white elite world of St. Paul's. She reflects on these feelings of in betweenness during her first visit home. She writes,

I wanted to weep with frustration. ...My new friends and I knew each other's daily routines, but we had no history – and no future, I thought, when we all went

back to our real lives. But back in real life, Karen and Ruthie and I, once past the memories, had to work hard just to keep talking. At my own house I felt as if I were fighting for a new position in the family order. ...Everywhere I went I felt out of place. The fact was that I had left home in September gleeful and smug. I took it as divine justice that now I felt as if I no longer belonged anywhere. (p. 99 – 100)

Through the end of her first year, Cary continued to view her experience at St. Paul's as isolated from her "real life". During her second year, she began to accept it as part of her real life.

Cary thrives during her senior year at St. Paul's. She finds a mentor in Miss Clinton, a Spanish teacher who wore her Blackness proudly while earning the respect of her white peers. She becomes active on campus serving as vice-president of her class, wrote articles for the school newspaper, and joined the astronomy club. She comes to understand that the education St. Paul's is offering her is not just a more advanced version of the education she encountered at Yeadon High. St. Paul's offers education as it was meant to be; democratic, critical and empowering. Years later, as she reflects on her experiences Cary concludes that "the isolation [she'd] felt was an illusion" (p. 6).

Without [my] stories and [my] songs, I am mute. A white American education will never give them to me; but it can – if I am graced, if I do not go blind in the white light of self-consciousness, if have guides before me and the sense to heed them – it can help me to see the stories...It can help me search out the very history it did not teach me. (p. 237)

It is this lesson of grace, “accepting that you are accepted” (p. 235) and the need to life’s experiences, whatever they may be and wherever they may take you, and “use it well” (Cary, 2005, p.1) that Carey shares through her auto/biography.

In *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood* bell hooks (1996) looks back from her position as a feminist scholar to write a testimony to Black girlhood. Hooks criticizes feminist thinkers writing and talking about Black girlhood based on their experiences as white girls. They portray Black girls’ self-esteem as better than that of white girls simply because Black girls “are more assertive, speak more, appear more confident” (p. xiii). She asserts that historically Black girls have been expected to contribute to the uplifting of their race making their bold behavior necessary. For many Black girls, including hooks, their boldness may still mask feelings of worthlessness. *Bone Black* documents hooks’ struggles with self-esteem and loneliness at home and in schools and her discovery of writing as freedom.

Hooks grew up in Kentucky one of seven children born to Veodis and Rosa Bell Watkins. She describes her father as “a critical thinker...influenced by the cultural milieu of the forties” but it is her mother she credits with instilling “in all her children the desire to learn” (hooks, 2003, p. 118). Three of the Watkins children would go on to become teachers and one a clinical psychologist.

Hooks’ girlhood stories are “life sustaining and life affirming” (p. xi). Violence – emotional, verbal, and physical – permeates them as well. Speaking in third person, hooks (1996) describes one particularly violent incident involving her parents.

In her dark place on the stairs she is seeing ... the still body of the woman pleading, crying...the man angry, yelling. She sees that the man has a gun. She

hears him tell the woman that he will kill her...When he leaves the room she comes to ask the woman if she is all right...The woman's voice is full of tenderness and hurt...She tells her daughter ... that everything will be all right.

The daughter does not believe her. (p. 148)

The trauma hooks experiences as a result of her father's violence is evident by the amount of space it occupies in the book. While she limits other events to a single, short chapter she spends three chapters reflecting on her parents' abusive relationship.

Hooks (1996) is both witness to and victim of her father's physical violence, but the verbal and emotional abuse inflicted by her mother seems to impact her the most. Hooks is repeatedly told by her mother that she can't stand her, that she can't do anything right and that she is crazy. The violence manifests in hooks' young life as loneliness and depression. Yet she survives. Sustenance and affirmation come through Big Mama, her father's grandmother who "never yells at [her] – never treats [her] harshly, and Miss Emma a church member who said her voice "would go on speaking and name itself in the world" (p. 45), and her grandmother Saru who tells hooks she will "be a warrior" (p. 51). These are the pictures of Black girlhood, both empowering and frightening, that hooks once her reader to see.

Nettles' narrative explores her personal struggle living with and healing from a diseased brain. In *Crazy Visitation: A Chronicle of Illness and Recovery*, Nettles (2001), now fully recovered, explores her experience as participant observer. She questions, "why did [she] bend and return to whole, while others under equally harrowing conditions break in spirit, becoming bitter, angry, or depressed" (p. 2). She regresses into

the past to re-interpret, through the lens of her illness, stories of her challenges as a parent, wife, and educator.

The great, great granddaughter of former slaves, Nettles was born into education. While neither of her great, great grandparents attended high school, some their grandchildren attended normal schools in Georgia and went on to become teachers. Nettles' father, a graduate of Morehouse University, was a mathematics teacher and principal, her mother a kindergarten teacher and reading specialist. Nettles graduated from Howard University in 1967 with a degree in philosophy. She went on to earn a master's in library and information science from the University of Illinois and a psychology degree from Howard.

In 1995, Nettles was silenced by illness. She suffered from aphasia, an experience she describes here.

I had no trouble following what people said, their nuances of phrase and tone. I could read. I could even move my mouth and vocalize words. But I had large gaps in my sentences. Every part of me knew what I wanted to say. Take water, for instance. I could see a glass of it, hear the sound of it running from the faucet into a bathtub, smell the off-odor of opaque crystals that form in ice trays left in the freezer for too long, feel the tingly bubbles in Perrier on my tongue. But I could not go to the place in my brain that contained the word. (Nettles, 2001, p. 21)

The aphasia was a symptom of a tumor that had grown in her brain undetected for years. On January 14 Nettles was hospitalized after suffering a seizure. Four days later, she underwent surgery to remove the tumor.

The benign tumor was successfully removed and a week later, Nettles was discharged. Her rehabilitation, physical and emotional, was just beginning. Over the next nine months she would spend six hours a week in physical and speech therapy before returning to teaching in the fall of 1995. Here she reflects on the lessons she learned about resilience from her own illness and recovery.

The story of my struggle to stabilize my... foundation was told in the days when I rested while others cared for me, when I walked beside the little lake in my neighborhood, when I learned to pay attention to all sorts of stimuli in speech therapy, and when I tried to recover enough brain power to do my work as a scholar. As a black woman, I was all too familiar with the survival narrative... But in reentering the world beyond my wisteria trellis, I went beyond lass and survival to a new narrative...built on... agency, expressed in strivings for power and independence... [and] connection, the strivings for love and intimacy. (p. 148-149)

From her illness and recovery she offers a reconceptualization of resilience as not merely biological and psychological but as transformation, “the capacity for the individual to emerge renewed, sometimes stronger, after calamity” (p. 5).

### **Doing my Study**

I situate my own work among that of these Black women educators using auto/biography as a form of inquiry. I share stories of my life in schools as a student and as an educator. Information for my auto/biography was collected through historical research, review of family documents and photographs, oral history, and a researcher reflective journal. Historical information was gathered from books, newspaper articles,

and internet sites to provide the historical context for my auto/biography. Copies of articles and pertinent information from websites were printed. Relevant information was highlighted and the copies organized in a notebook. Family documents including Bibles, family trees, letters, and pictures were reviewed to provide the family narrative. Items were scanned and then downloaded onto disks for storage. Family stories were recounted by my mother during informal conversations, usually around her kitchen table. Details of this oral history along with my reflections were then written in my journal as soon after the conversations as possible. Also recorded in my journal were notes from reading materials, my reflections of the reading, and daily events relevant to this study. My stories are told in the context of family, community, and historical narrative to gain understanding of how my experiences impact my work as a school administrator.



### CHAPTER 3

#### MY MEMORY QUILT: STORIES OF BLACK WOMEN TEACHING AND LEARNING IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

This dissertation uses auto/biographical inquiry to explore four Black women's stories of learning and teaching in American schools. I situate my narrative within the context of community narrative by tracing the history of Black education from slavery through the desegregation and the later resegregation of public schools. I present this community narrative in italics. I contend that this history and my experiences in desegregated and segregated classrooms impact my practice as a school leader and the vision I have for the school I lead. I analyze my narrative making new meaning of my stories and gaining new understanding of who I was and how I became who I am (Bateson, 1989). I do this work first to free myself of the silence passed down through four generations of Black women and second to understand of how my experiences inform my practice as an administrator. With this understanding, I create my vision for a school that educates and empowers Black children and I find the courage to bring that vision to life.

When Black women could not read or write they still shared their stories. Many "slave women quilted their diaries, creating permanent, but unwritten records...of pain and loss, of triumph and tragedy in their lives....Each piece of cloth became the focal point of a remembered past" (Fry, 2002, p. 1). This chapter is my "memory quilt" (Wahlman, 2001, p. 36), recording scenes from my life and the lives of other women in my family who have so greatly influenced my life.

My granny, Hattie Cummings Wilcher forms the backing for my memory quilt. The backing or bottom layer of quilts “serves to stabilize...and enables the quilter to enclose the batting” (Tobin & Dobard, 1999, p. 198). Granny Hattie is that stability. Her life and dedication to education forms the foundation for the work I do today. My mother, Connie Wilcher Duggan, is the batting that connects me to my granny and the lessons she taught. My story forms the top layer, pieced together from fragments of memories and stories, the squares then stitched together to form a whole. With my Danielle, a new quilt takes shape as she begins guiding her son’s education. In this chapter I share my memory quilt.

### **Hattie Cummings Wilcher: Teaching in a Common School**

*Even before their emancipation, Black Americans had an incredible desire to be educated. They held an almost reverent belief in education “as a contradiction to oppression” and a “means to liberation and freedom” (Anderson, 1998, p. 17). Northern missionaries arrived in the south following the Civil War to discover former slaves had begun their own educational movement establishing and sustaining their own schools. By 1866, just one year after the official end of the Civil War, Black Georgians supported 96 schools and owned 57 school buildings. These early leaders in Black education were reluctant to allow outsiders to reform those schools and actively resisted their interference. Years later Hattie’s father would play a role in the founding of one such school and she would grow up to teach in one.*

**Hattie's Story**

I was born January 14, 1892. Reconstruction had come and gone and sharecropping had replaced slavery. White folks would hold a lynching like it was a church social, packing picnics and bringing their children to watch. All we were good for to them was to work their fields and keep their houses. But men like my Daddy knew better. He was a member of the Second Washington Baptist Association. Back in 1883, the Association decided colored folks in Washington County, Georgia needed a school. It took them five years to raise enough money to buy the land and another year to raise the building. There was also a dorm for the students and a house for the teachers. The first class was finally held at Second Washington High School in 1889. The school was converted into Washington County Training School by 1913. I married Saddle Wilcher that June and the next year was teaching in a small school in Johnson County, Georgia. Boatwright Wilcher, Vandelia Wilcher, Mary Wilcher, and Adier Wilcher, Saddle's children by his first wife, and my sister Susie Cummings were in my class along with about 25 other children. Parents paid about ten cents each month, if they could, for their children to attend. I taught school for over 37 years before retiring in 1949. My parents made sure we got an education and I made sure my children and my granddaughter, Connie, did too. My sons Jack and Remus eventually left the South. Jack settled in Milwaukee and Remus in Oakland. Both built dry cleaning businesses. Lilla, Connie's mother, was my youngest daughter. She ran successful business from home and took care of me

when illness and age set in. Connie went on to graduate from high school. I can't help but believe the example my papa set for me made this all possible.



Figure 5: Hattie Cummings Wilcher

My great grandmother's story amazes me. I grew up knowing she was a teacher but it was not until I understood the history surrounding her teaching that I understood how incredible she was. In the spirit of Black feminist past and present, Granny rejected controlling images of Black women as merely mammies and workhorses. She defined herself as both educated and educator. Education was the key to her children and others not being bound to the fields. I am left to wonder about the source of her empowerment.

What drove her to make the choice to teach? What sustained her commitment and determination?

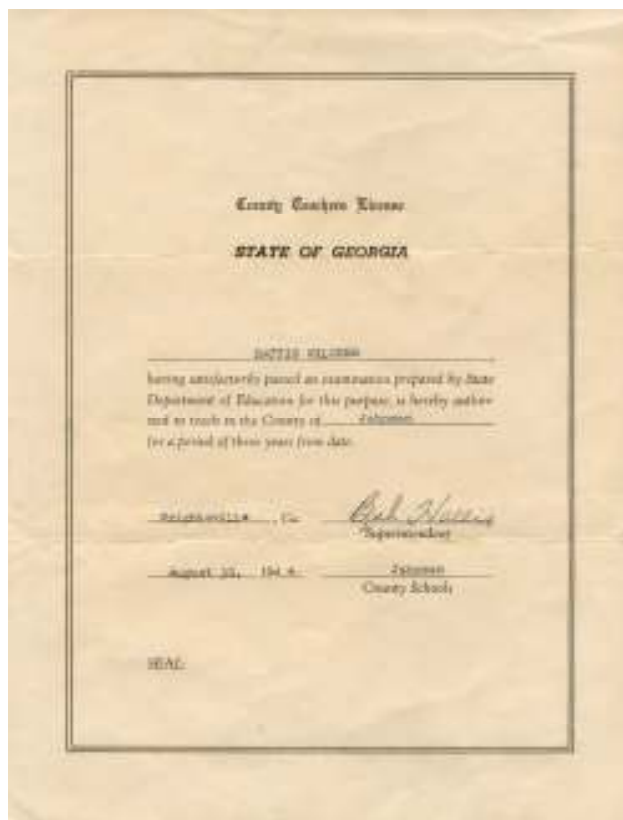


Figure 6: Hattie's Teacher License

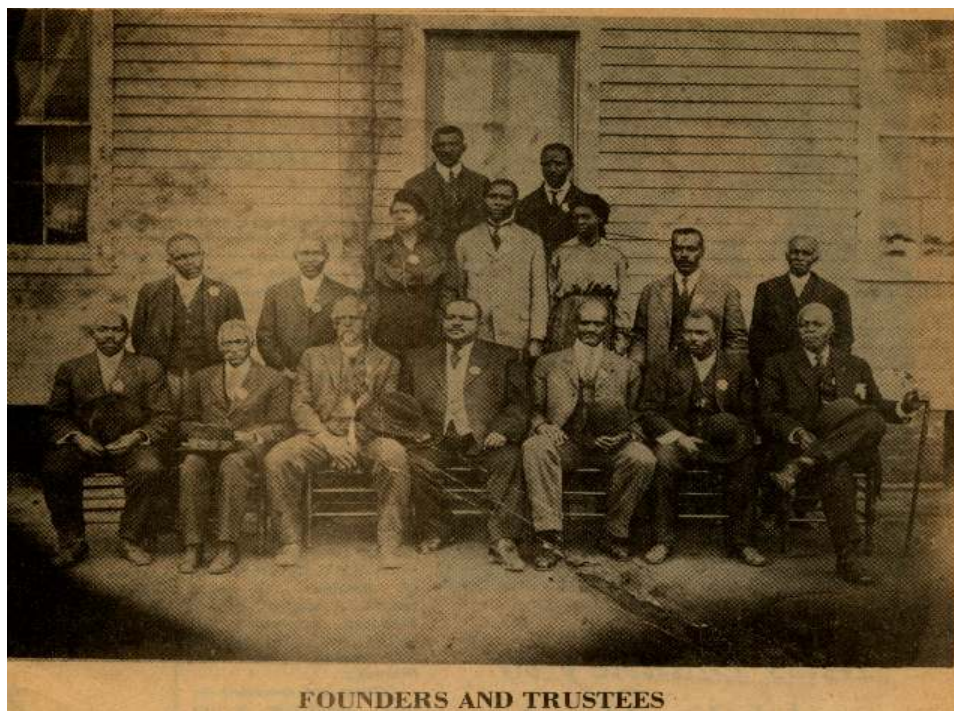


Figure 7: Founders and Trustees of the Second Washington High School

### **Connie Wilcher Duggan: Learning in Value Rich Black School**

*With the end of Reconstruction northern industrialists became interested in expanding their markets into the south. The success of their venture however required the cooperation of white southern land owners and an efficient and content workforce of unskilled and semiskilled workers (Watkins, 2001). A system of Industrial Education for Blacks modeled after the work being done at Hampton Agricultural and Industrial Institute in Virginia and Tuskegee Agricultural and Industrial Institute in Alabama could provide both. Under the leadership of former Freedmen's Bureau official and white supremacist General Samuel Chapman Armstrong and his Black student Booker T. Washington, Hampton and Tuskegee offered a curriculum focused on developing teachers who would in turn "train workers who [were] dutiful, hard working, and capable of contributing to the growing labor needs of the postwar South" with no "focus on politics and oppression" (Lee & Slaughter-Defoe, 2004, p. 467).*

*The Hampton-Tuskegee model of industrial education gained the support of the northern industrialists. Working with southern supporters of their efforts and white educators, they formed the Southern Education Board and the General Education Board. Through these organizations they worked to establish a system of education for southern Blacks based on the model. The Southern Education Board was the propaganda organization for the group charged with winning support for their views. The General Education Board was funded by John D. Rockefeller and provided financial support for "expanding education to all southerners" in general and colonial education to southern Blacks in particular (Watkins, 2001, p. 128). Philanthropic organizations such as the Anna T. Jeanes Fund and the Julius T. Rosenwald Fund did their work through the*

*General Education Board. The Jeanes Fund paid a percentage of the salary for supervisors of industrial teachers in rural common schools (Anderson, 1988). The Rosenwald Fund paid a portion of the costs for constructing rural schools that implemented (or claimed to implement) the Hampton-Tuskegee model of industrial education. These organizations had a profound impact on education for Blacks in the south including the education of my mother.*

### **Connie's Story**

I was born to Lilla Wilcher December 5, 1941, just two days before Pearl Harbor pulled the United States into World War II. Lilla was only 15 so I was raised by my grandmother, Hattie Cummings Wilcher. I called her Mama. Mama was a teacher in Johnson County, Georgia. I remember leaving our home in Wrightsville, Georgia on Sunday evenings and walking the three miles to the school in Donovan. During the week we would room with families in Donovan and after school on Friday walk back to Wrightsville. Mama retired from teaching in 1949. Two years later, we moved to Sandersville in Washington County, Georgia and I entered the 5<sup>th</sup> grade at Thomas Jefferson Elder High and Industrial School. The school was originally called Second Washington High School. It was founded in 1889 by the Second Washington Baptist Association and Professor Thomas Jefferson Elder. Elder and his wife had been teaching in a local church when a group of trustees recommended building a school. It would be the only school in Washington County for Black children for many years. It became a public school in 1913 and was renamed Washington County Training School. A Rosenwald building was constructed to house the school in 1917. It

was a brick building shaped like an “H” and had wooden floors. There was an auditorium with a stage, ten classrooms, and vocational training rooms. It was renamed Thomas Jefferson Elder High and Industrial School in 1933 and when I entered ten years later it still housed students in 1<sup>st</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades. I have good memories of my years at T. J. Elder. My classes included Algebra, Biology, English, Oration, World History, American History, Typing, and Home Economics. My teachers really cared and expected us to do our best. Many were graduates of schools like Savannah State, Albany State, Fort Valley, and Tuskegee Institute. They held students to high standards and pushed them to do well. One of those teachers was Miss Pearson. Eunice Pearson graduated from Fort Valley State with a B. S. in Social Science and had earned a M. A. from Atlanta University. She was a strict teacher who loved history and required that we respect it and her class. I was in her World History class the year *Peyton Place* (Metalious, 1956/1999) was published. We would sometimes hide the novel in our history books and read them during class. Miss Pearson became famous for throwing them into her wood burning stove. I believe to this day that she heated her classroom for that entire winter off of those novels. We also had extra curricular activities at Elder. I was in the Dramatics Club, New Homemakers of America, the Commercial Arts Club, the Choral Club, was a majorette in the band and worked as student library assistant. Other activities included a student council, the New Farmers of America, band, football, and girls and boys basketball. Many of our activities were supported by the Parent-Teacher Association. Years later I went back to T. J. Elder as a substitute teacher. It felt



good to give something back to the school that had given so much to me. I left Elder knowing I was smart and capable. Years later, the self-confidence I gained there encouraged me to go back to school, first to earn a degree in clerical science and later to study computer programming.



Figure 8: Connie High School Graduation

The education my mother received at Thomas J. Elder High School bears witness to the determination of Black educators. Working within the constraints placed on them by funding agencies such as the Jeanes and Rosenwald funds, Black school leaders still managed to ensure their students received the academic education they knew would enable them to better their lives and their communities. They set high expectations for

their students and supported them in achieving those expectations. They also ensured that they had experiences in and out of the classroom that would foster a sense of belonging and accomplishment. My mother took what was given to her a T. J. Elder and applied it to the raising of her children. Even today she is the one person I hate most to disappoint. It is because of her expectations and support that I have achieved so much in life. Those expectations later found their way into my work with students after I became a teacher and into my relationship with my daughter Danielle and now her son DaJaun.



Figure 9: A Young Connie



Figure 10: T. J. Elder with his Wife and Daughter



Figure 11: Washington County Training School



Figure 12: T.J. Elder Building in 2004

## Sonya D. Jefferson: Learning and Teaching across the Segregation/Desegregation Continuum

*Although the modern Civil Rights Movement began with the Supreme Court ruling in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas, it was not the first school desegregation case in the United States. The Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts delivered its opinion Sarah C. Roberts v. The City of Boston with in April of 1850 (Schwarz, 2000). The city of Boston had refused Sarah, an African American, enrollment in a white public school close to her home insisting that she attend an all black school further away. The court ruled against her on the grounds that “equality before the law did not require identical treatment in all situations” (Schwarz, 2000, ¶6). According to Chief Justice, Lemeul Shaw, separate schools were necessary to meet the differing needs of Blacks and whites.*

*Over one hundred years later, the ruling on Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas was handed down. Oliver Brown, whose daughter had been denied admission to an all-white elementary school in Topeka, was recruited along with twelve other parents by the president of their local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to challenge the legality of segregated schools. The case was heard before the District Court for the District of Kansas on February 28, 1951. While the judges agreed that segregation “has a detrimental effect upon the colored children” they ruled against the plaintiffs citing Plessey v. Ferguson, an earlier Supreme Court ruling which paved the way for the separate by equal approach to schooling (Pitts, 1999).*

*The NAACP appealed and in October of 1951 the case was combined with similar cases from South Carolina, Virginia, Delaware, and the District of Columbia and became known officially as Oliver L. Brown et al. v. The Board of Education of Topeka, et al. with Thurgood Marshall as chief counsel. The case was first argued before the Supreme Court in December of 1952 and then again in December of 1953. On May 17, 1954, Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren read the ruling, which included,*

*in the field of public education the doctrine 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold the plaintiffs and others similarly situated...deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.*

*(High court outlaws school segregation, 1954 May 18, p. A1)*

*This would prove to be the beginning of a long struggle toward unitary school systems.*

#### Sonya's Story

If my early life were a movie, protest songs would be the soundtrack. While I practiced the few dance moves I still remember to the Temptations and can still recall the words to Isaac Hayes' I Stand Accused, lyrics of resistance and protest float along side my memories of early childhood. Songs like Dion's Abraham, Martin, and John;

*Anybody here seen my old friend Martin? Can you tell me where he's gone? He freed a lot of people but it seems the good they die young*  
*(Holler, 1968)*

Lambert and Potter's (1969) One Tin Soldier;

*Go ahead and hate your neighbor, go ahead and cheat a friend*

*Do it in the name of Heaven, you can justify it in the end.*

*There wont be any trumpets blowing, come the judgement day.*

And Dylan's (1963) Blowin' in the Wind;

*How many years can some people exist*

*Before they're allowed to be free*

*How many times can a man turn his head*

*And pretend he just doesn't see*

permeate my memories of the sixties. The meanings behind the verses were not always clear, but even as a child I knew there was something deeper being represented than the words I was hearing and that somehow it was related to the turmoil we were witnessing. I was born into the Civil Rights Movement. Sit-ins and Freedom Rides were memories too recent to be considered history and many Southern Blacks were terrified of registering to vote. Greyhound and Trailways buses were still segregated as were most schools in the South. The Civil Rights Movement framed my experiences in those early years and continues to impact my life and my work as an elementary school principal. My mother was 12 years old when the Supreme Court's ruling on Brown v. Board was read. Her grandmother, Hattie Cummings Wilcher, had been a teacher in the Johnson County School system in Georgia. Mom began her education in her grandmother's one room schoolhouse. They would leave their home, then in Wrightsville, Georgia on Sunday evenings and make the three-mile walk to Donovan where my great grandmother taught. Mom and Hattie would spend evenings with a family in Donovan and after class on Friday make the return trip

to Wrightsville. When my mother was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, the family moved to Washington County and she began attending Thomas Jefferson Elder High and Industrial School, a 1<sup>st</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade all Black school in Sandersville, Georgia. My mother's great grandfather, Ike Cummings, was a member of the Second Washington Baptist Association, founders and trustees of the Second Washington High School. The original building was constructed in 1889, and in 1981 it became the first Rosenwald School in Georgia to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places (Williams, 2001). I finished the second semester of 4<sup>th</sup> grade in that building. My mother remembers little reaction to Brown v. Board of Education. She remembers reading about it in the paper and doing current events on it but there was no trouble. Sandersville was too small.

*While news of the Supreme Court ruling may have passed without incident in Sandersville, the South reacted with massive resistance. Ninety-six members of Congress signed the Southern Manifesto. Drafted by Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, the manifesto accused the Supreme Court of substituting "naked judicial power" and "personal political and social ideas for established law of the land" in reaching its "unwarranted decision" in the case (The Southern Manifesto, 1956). Districts such as Prince Edwards County in Virginia closed their schools rather than face desegregation (Peeples & Picott, 1964). Courts throughout the South delayed desegregation cases while legislatures passed laws forbidding it (Ogletree, 2004).*

*Herman Talmadge, then governor of Georgia declared the Brown decision a "bald political decree" that Georgia "cannot and will not accept" (Racial bar held illegal, May 18, 1954, p. A1). Under his direction, a committee investigated the*

*possibility of abolishing public schools in Georgia and establishing a private school system. In November voters approved an amendment to the Georgia constitution allowing the elimination of the public school system and allowing the state to give funds directly to families for tuition if integration were enforced (Cashin, 1985).*

*The Georgia General Assembly made it a felony for any school official to allow integration and established punishments for police officers who attempted to enforce it. A State Board of Education policy was put in place to bar for life any teacher who entered a racially mixed classroom. Black teachers were ordered to withdraw their memberships from the NAACP. As a final visible demonstration of resistance, the confederate battle emblem was placed alongside the state seal on the state flag. By 1964, only 4 of the 181 Georgia school districts serving both Black and white students were desegregated (U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1964).*

Mom graduated from T. J. Elder High School in 1959. Three years later, she married her high school sweetheart, Fred Duggan, Jr. who was then a soldier in the army. Nine months later I was born. My father was also a graduate of T. J. Elder and continued his education through the army. His service in the military allowed us to avoid the south during those turbulent years of the 60's. This good fortune however, came with a price. It was very common for me to be the only African American in my class. I have no specific memory of being discriminated against in school. I do have memories of being quiet and withdrawn and feeling alone and afraid. One of my favorite books was *Harry the Dirty Dog* (Zion, 1956). Harry, a loved family pet, runs away from home one morning and after several incidents of mischief finds himself, a white dog with black spots, transformed into

a black dog with white spots, unknown, rejected, his identity hidden from those he loves. Only after his coat is scrubbed clean of its blackness is his position in the family again secure. A recent rereading of this drama led me to question what it meant for me as a young black girl attending predominately-white Eisenhower Elementary School. Eisenhower Elementary is located near the Fort Sill Army Base in Lawton, Oklahoma. In 1963 the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare announced that segregated schools would be regarded as unsuitable for children whose parents lived and worked on Federal installations. As a result, schools in Lawton were desegregated when I entered Gladys Fullerton's 1<sup>st</sup> grade class at Eisenhower Elementary School in 1968. My memories of that first year in school are limited. There was the time the teacher slammed a ruler down on my desk because I was talking to my neighbor. I remember an evening spent with my mother trying to learn the difference between a 6 and a 9. I also remember wanting to be a member of the Blue Birds but having to join the Brownies instead. Now I wonder if I would not have been welcomed as a Blue Bird. In any case, I remained a member of the Girl Scouts through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Perhaps my most poignant memory is of the Dick and Jane readers which to my horror appear to be making a comeback. In some ways my life was reflected in the stories of Dick and Jane. Life, however, was not as simple and perfect and white as those Dick and Jane tales would have me believe. My mother's first parent/teacher conference is a good example. Mom remembers clearly the scolding she received from my teacher during that meeting. It seems Miss Fullerton was outraged at me not having attended kindergarten. My mother was forced to explain that while my



father's military service did not provide enough income for private kindergarten tuition, it provided too much for me to attend Head Start, the only alternative at that time. An initiative of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, Head Start was designed to compensate for perceived deficits in children's preschool experiences and language development. While I had not attended kindergarten, I was by no means culturally deprived. I always had access to books and was read to regularly. My parents insisted that I speak Standard English and provided many rich experiences. Prior to entering Miss Fullerton's class, I had lived in three states and had traveled to and through numerous others. Some of my fondest memories of growing up are from our annual road trips. During those trips I learned to enjoy my father's music. He was a fan of the Motown, Sam and Dave, The Temptations, The Supremes. Their music on the 8-track tape player kept me company during those long road trips. Even today, I feel closest to my father through that music. Often those trips "home" corresponded with the homecoming of aunts, uncles, and cousins from Florida, California, Michigan, Wisconsin, and New York. We played hide and seek in Grandma Julia's backyard, chased and caught fireflies at twilight, ran through the tall stalks of Grandma Lilla's cornfield and snuck green apples off her trees in spite of warnings that they were not yet ripe. Less pleasant memories include hours spent on the back porch, shelling peas or shucking corn. The cornhusks would later be used as hair for dolls made with Coca Cola bottles. Miss Fullerton, like too many educators, was misguided in her assumptions. I had lived a life full of rich experiences by the time I entered her classroom. Unfortunately, those

experiences did not fit inside Miss Fullerton's curriculum and were ignored. My reactions to her judgments were physical. On numerous occasions that school term, I became too ill to remain at school. Eventually, a doctor diagnosed a nervous stomach and instructed my mother to provide me with a light breakfast of fruit and toast, a remedy that continues to work even now during stressful times. During my fourth grade year my father received orders for Germany. Because we could not secure housing in time to make the trip with him, the decision was made for me, my younger brother, and my mother to stay with family in Sandersville until the end of the school year. We would then join my father in Germany. Unlike my classes in Oklahoma, my class in Sandersville was almost entirely Black. I belonged in this space no more than I did in those predominately-white classes. I was a good student and regularly received A's and B's on my report card. I also "talked proper" meaning I spoke Standard English. These two facts, paired with the nice, often homemade, clothes my parents sacrificed to provide for me marked me as different in the eyes of my Black classmates. The one white child in the class became my best friends. My contact with her, however, was limited to school and an occasional conversation on the telephone. Following the end of school that summer, we joined my father. The year we spent in Germany was truly like being in exile. I did not and do not make friends easily and there was no American television for the first nine months. Books became a safe haven. I would read anything I could get my hands on from Archie and Veronica comic books to *Black Beauty* (Sewell, 1877/2002). Many of the stories are long forgotten, but the feeling of comfort and security that comes from getting lost in

pages of text remains. Despite the isolation, my school experiences in Germany were valuable. I had the opportunity that year to participate in an open classroom. The open-classroom concept originated in post World War II Great Britain and found its way to the United States in the late 1960's (Cuban, 2004). Similar to humanistic education, open education is concerned with "the freeing of the human spirit through appropriate education" (Hein, 1975, p. 30). Characteristics of open classrooms include integration of content, hands on and craft activities, and a focus on social interaction as well as intellect. My class at Ansbach Elementary School in Germany included 5th, 6th, and 7th grade boys and girls. Our instructional day was broken into a skills block during which we worked on individualized assignments, a project block that involved painting a mural on one of the classroom walls, and a literacy block of independent reading and journal writing. The curriculum also included the German language and culture with numerous field trips to cultural and historic sites. While the return to basics movement had driven open classrooms out of most schools by 1983 when my teaching career began, my experiences during that year have nurtured my philosophy and practice as an educator. Before my sixth grade year began, my father was killed in a traffic accident. His death marked the end of my childhood.

*Although the Georgia constitution of 1777 mandated "schools shall be erected in each county and supported at the general expense of the State", legislation establishing the first public school in Georgia was not passed until 1783. Established in Augusta, The Academy of Richmond County offered a college preparatory program for boys with emphasis in math and the classics. A department for girls focused on languages and*

*needlework. The school charged tuition to defray costs. A free school supported by private donations was established in 1821 for those who could not afford tuition.*

*Interest in education for the masses grew following the Civil War and in 1870, the “Act to Establish a System of Public Instruction” became state law (Cashin, 1985). The law called for Black and white to be educated separately yet with “the same facilities for each, both as regards school houses and fixtures, attainments and abilities of teachers, length of time and all other matters pertaining to education” (p. 63) . In September 1871, 22 schools opened in Richmond County under the newly established Richmond County Board of Education, 8 of them for Black students.*

*In 1878 William J. White, founder of the Augusta Baptist Institute (later renamed Morehouse College) led a group of Black citizens in requesting a public high school for Black students. Two years later Ware High School, one of the first in the South for Blacks, opened its doors with 36 students. The school remained opened until 1897 when, citing that the \$842 the RCBOE spent on educating students at the school could be better spent educating primary students, trustees closed its doors.*

*This action led to a court case with little known connections to Brown v. Board. Cumming v. Board of Education of Richmond County was argued before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1899. The plaintiffs charged that “the tax for the support of high schools was illegal and void for the reason that that system was for the benefit of the white population exclusively” and thus violated their rights under the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the RCBOE stating, “Its decision was in the interest of the greater number of colored children”. Providing justification for states in numerous cases that ensued, the Supreme Court added,*

*The education of the people in schools maintained by state taxation is a matter belonging to the respective states, and any interference on the part of Federal authority with the management of such schools cannot be justified except in the case of a clear and unmistakable disregard of rights secured by the supreme law of the land. (U. S. Supreme Court, 1899)*

*Ware remained closed and the Black citizens of Richmond County were without a public high school until 1936.*

*After this ruling, the school system lacked motivation to maintain even the pretense of sameness among Black and white schools. A study conducted by the University of Georgia in 1949 noted disturbing differences in facilities, teacher training, and resources (Aderhold, Aaron, Bledsoe, Pendelton, & Williams, 1950). Of the 24 buildings housing Black schools in the system, 50% were rated unfit for school use. Another 33% were rated very poor. All of the sites for Black schools were noted as too small. Only four had central heating. Classrooms in the others relied on “individual unjacketed stoves using coal for fuel” (p. 20). Some buildings had no electric light fixtures and others poor lighting or lighting only in limited areas. Doughty School with “toilets ...of the outdoor pit type” housed 260 students in 4 classrooms (p. 23). Conditions at Steed School were direr. With an enrollment of 850 students and only 10 classrooms, double sessions were required. One rural school had no water leading to the recommendation that the building “be abandoned immediately” (p. 26).*

*While the majority of teachers in the system held a certificate based on four years of college, 60% of the white teachers had completed at least 4 years of college compared to 48% of the Black teachers. Salaries among white teachers ranged from \$1,515 to*

*\$5,074 while salaries among Black teachers ranged from \$700 to \$3091. While the average number of students taught per day was 39, some Black teachers saw as many as 60 students every day. A 1948 grand jury declared that Richmond County students were receiving “a barely adequate elementary education” (Cashin, 1985, p. 91). If this was true for Richmond County students in general, there can be little doubt that Black children in Richmond County were receiving even less.*

*Despite these conditions, Black teachers demonstrated a remarkable commitment to their professional development. Seventy-two percent noted participating in “summer school” during the 5 years prior to the survey compared to only 32% of the white teachers. Another 50% of Black teachers participated in on-the-job training or in-services and 44% in correspondence or extension courses. Walker (1996) asserts such commitment to professional learning demonstrated institutional caring, a contributor to the success of many segregated schools.*

*Not until 1963 did Augustans begin to demand an end to the segregated system. Speaking on behalf of 600 Black petitioners, attorney John D. Watkins requested the Richmond County Board of Education desegregation plan. Citing the 1872 law under which the school system was formed, trustees determined it was illegal to integrate the system’s schools. A year later, the courts ruled the law unconstitutional and lawyers for the petitioners again requested the desegregation plan.*

*After no action by the school board, attorneys John Ruffin and Donald Hollowell, with the assistance of New York attorneys Jack Greenberg and Derrick Bell (his teachings at Harvard Law School would later inspire the development of Critical Race Theory) filed an injunction to prevent Richmond County’s segregated schools from*

*opening for the new school year. In July the Board provided a plan which opened grades 1, 2, and 3 to all students who lived in a school's attendance zone. Ten Black children enrolled in previously all white elementary schools.*

*The Board opened grades 1 through 6 to all students in February 1965, and in September, all grades were opened to all students living within assigned attendance zones. In two of the zones, all but two of the schools were white. In the third zone, all but two of the schools were Black. The result was little change in the level of integration. The Academy of Richmond County High School admitted 9 Black students and ordered that boys and girls be separated. In March of 1966, the separation policy was extended to three other high schools.*

*In 1967, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare determined the Richmond County plan was not acceptable and the courts ordered the Board to develop a new plan. The Board instead stalled leading Judge Alexander Lawrence to order that a bi-racial committee be appointed to develop the plan. A week later, the committee recommended a plan that called for the pairing of some schools, the rezoning of others, and the closing of one. The most controversial part of the plan involved the voluntary desegregation of faculties. Judge Lawrence rejected this recommendation and ordered that faculties be assigned to reflect the 60% white, 40% Black racial make-up of the county. Despite resignations of 87 teachers and a number of demonstrations staged by protest groups, schools opened three weeks later.*

*The following summer the Supreme Court ruled the pairing plan unacceptable and Judge Lawrence again ordered a new plan be developed (Conley, 1971 August 27). The Board presented a plan that would have resulted in the transferring of only 350*

*students. Dissatisfied with this effort, Judge Lawrence requested that the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare develop a plan.*

*Myrl G. Herman and J. Howard Munzer, professors of education from Rhode Island College, arrived in Augusta in September to prepare the desegregation plan. Herman and Munzer, architects of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, North Carolina plan, spent two days meeting with then Superintendent Roy Rollins and visiting schools. In response, the County Council of Parents and Teachers voted to support a resolution which expressed opposition to forced busing, board members openly voiced indecision over whether or not they would vote to obey a new court order, and the group Concerned Citizens for Neighborhood Schools was formed “to promote the concept of neighborhood schools and seek ways to combat forced busing” (Conley, 1971 September 3).*

*Following the denial of the Board’s request for a stay, the desegregation plan was implemented February 15, 1972. Over 50% of the county’s students stayed home in protest. White flight ensued as parents enrolled their children in newly formed church sponsored “Freedom schools” (Alston & Adams, 1972 March 16). The following year I enrolled in desegregated Windsor Spring Elementary School in Richmond County.*

The day after my father’s death we returned to the states and spent the remaining weeks of summer in Sandersville. My mother made the wise decision not to remain there permanently, choosing instead to relocate to Augusta, just an hour away instead. I often think about how brave my mother had to be to make such a decision. She and my father married shortly after high school. Aside from his two tours in Vietnam and the six months waiting to join him in Germany, they had never been separated. Now she was alone with two children. I suppose that



is why she always insisted that I go to college. What I did after that was up to me she always said, but I would be able to support myself. This is a message she and I have both impressed on my daughter. In August, I entered Miss Maund's sixth grade class at Windsor Spring Elementary. The school was overcrowded and as a result on double sessions. My brother and I attended the afternoon session, arriving at school at 1:00pm and leaving at 7:00pm. Miss Maund's class was the white class. I imagine my grades made me a good candidate to demonstrate the success of desegregation at Windsor Spring. I did not disappoint, earning honor roll recognition at the annual awards program. The following year, I was assigned to Mrs. Johnson's 7<sup>th</sup> grade class. Mrs. Johnson was Black as was her class. Mrs. Johnson showed a special interest in me in and out of school. When my test scores fell short of qualifying for the gifted program, she fought for me and I was admitted. She encouraged my mother to have me participate in the Tau-ettes, an organization for teenage girls sponsored by her sorority. My participation in that group was significant, building the self-esteem and courage I would need to survive my high school years. Because I had been in the elementary gifted program, I was eligible to take freshman algebra as an eighth grader at Glenn Hills High School. Math became a challenge with that decision and remained one into my college years. Geometry was the exception. The logic of proofs came easily and I excelled while many of my peers struggled. Those high school years were painful ones. Despite my struggles with math, I was successful academically and was considered one of the "smart kids" by most of my peers. Unlike the "smart kids" I struggled for my success, preventing me

from being a full member of their group as well. I lived those years at the margins of both groups and when the opportunity arose to graduate early, I took advantage. One month after my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, I enrolled in Augusta College and declared a major in medical technology. My decision not to pursue education was made on the advice of a senior member of my church. “You don’t want to go into education”, she had told me when I shared being torn between the two fields. “Teachers don’t make any money”. I had spent the previous summer in a program for minority students at the Medical College of Georgia, an opportunity I would not have had without my mother’s persistence. We learned of the program from another parent whose daughter had participated the previous summer. When we approached my guidance counselor, she informed my mother that I did not have what it took to be successful in such a program. My mother refused to be dismissed and insisted on receiving the necessary information. While I wasn’t an academic standout that summer, the experience fostered an excitement about science that found its way into my middle school classrooms years later. The program was designed to draw promising minority students into the medical field, while providing them with academic support in math, science, and critical reading. Over the course of the summer, we had the opportunity to experience various careers within the medical field, including medical technology. I enjoyed the time we spent in the laboratory and medical technologist, unlike teachers, did make money. Three events precipitated my change in majors, one academic the other two were more matters of the heart. It was not surprising that a health care major required numerous science courses. My struggles with those courses,

including nights of crying over chemistry homework, revealed that medical technology was not the path for me. At some point during the course of that same year, I came across the story of Marva Collins (Collins & Tamarkin, 1982/1990). Collins, a former public school teacher in Chicago, became disenchanted with an educational system that appeared content to allow Black children to fail and started her own school. Westside Preparatory School opened in September 1976 with 4 students including Collins' own daughter, Cindy. All of the children, with the exception of Cindy, were reading below grade level and bore the emotional scars of miseducation. As word of Westside Prep's successes grew so did enrollment and by February Collins had 17 students. In May, all of the students demonstrated substantial growth in reading and math. Collins' story inspired me, but it took a visit to my brother's elementary school to get me on the correct path. I can still remember walking in the door and being struck by a feeling of belonging. My response was a whispered acknowledgement of God's calling and the following week I switched my major. Two years later, I fulfilled my mother's expectations and graduated from Augusta College ready to teach. My teaching career began in 1983 with a 5<sup>th</sup> grade class at Gracewood Elementary in southern Richmond County. Those 29 kids taught me more about being a teacher than I learned in all four years of college. I can still see Tony crawling around on the floor chasing a lizard during the observation required for me to earn a renewable certificate. Tony taught me to remain calm under pressure. He and Cornelius also taught me the value of providing students relevant and meaningful learning experiences, regardless of their labels. We celebrated Black History Month that

year by completing research projects on famous Black Americans. Tony and Cornelius chose to work together researching Dr. Martin Luther King. The display and report those boys produced so impressed and moved me that I kept it for many years. Early in the year, the media specialist chastised me for expecting my kids to do research. “Many others have tried to teach them”, she said. “They just can’t do it,” she told me. Despite her discouragement, we kept going to the library and kept writing. My kids did learn how to use encyclopedias and the card catalog, to take notes and write them into intelligible sentences. That media specialist taught me the importance of having my own expectations for students and for keeping those expectations high. Five years later, I took the lessons I learned with me to Spirit Creek Middle. Marva Collins inspired me to become a teacher. Dr. Virginia Bradshaw inspired me to become an instructional leader. A staunch believer in the middle school concept, Dr. B had been an assistant principal at an inner city middle school and was serving as coordinator for the middle school program in Richmond County. In 1988, she was named principal of Spirit Creek, a brand new middle school scheduled to open the following school year. July 1989 we met as a faculty to build our dream. For five days, we worked together learning about each other, learning about ourselves, and forming our common philosophy of education. We were encouraged to dream and then given the space to make our dreams reality. I had never felt so passionate about teaching. I was excited about being a part of something special and worked hard to bring those feelings of belonging into my classroom. I still marvel at how Dr. Bradshaw inspired us and can only hope to be as successful as a leader. My

transition from teacher to administrator began at Spirit Creek Middle School. I had the opportunity to serve in several leadership positions including team leader and Science Teacher in Residence, a liaison between the district Science coordinator and science teachers on our staff. We were also encouraged and supported to participate in professional learning activities including local and national conferences. Serving as chairperson for a school improvement initiative and as coordinator for a curriculum alignment project were particularly powerful learning experiences. Those experiences also encouraged me to return to school and in 1998 I graduated from Augusta State University with a specialist degree in educational leadership. The following year I left Spirit Creek to begin life as a school administrator.

*By 1973, enrollment in Richmond County's public school was down by 7000 as white families left the system for private schools (Cashin, 1985). White flight from Richmond County's public schools eventually grew into white flight from the county itself. While both Richmond and neighboring Columbia County have seen an increase in population since 1970, Columbia County has seen an increase of over 80% compared to less than 12% for Richmond County. During the same time period, the white population in Richmond County has decreased by over 16% (Augusta-Richmond County Comprehensive plan, 2003).*

*Today Blacks represent the largest group of any race in Richmond County (McKinnon, 2001). Columbia County planners acknowledge that "many new residents...relocated from the Augusta Richmond County area to live in a more suburban, upscale setting with a high quality school system" (Columbia County 2025*

*long range transportation plan, 2004). Although race is not mentioned, the implication is clear; white residents relocate to Columbia County to escape predominately Black Richmond County. Adding to the challenge for the school system is migration of upper income Blacks to Columbia County as well.*

*The resulting resegregation of Richmond County schools reflects a common trend in neighborhood composition over time.*

*When a (B)lack family moves into a formerly all-white neighborhood, at least one white family's tolerance threshold is exceeded, causing it to leave... This departing white family is likely to be replaced by a (B)lack family... which violates yet another white family's preferences, causing it to exit... therefore, black-white differences in racial preferences and interpersonal variability in racial attitudes build a self-perpetuating dynamic into neighborhood change that lead to rapid racial turnover and inevitable resegregation. (Massey & Denton, 1993, p. 96-97)*

*As a result, we can no longer afford the false hope of desegregation as the solution for providing African American students a quality education. While working toward a day when the color of our neighbor's skin no longer matters, we must also worked toward ensuring African American students in resegregated schools receive the education they deserve.*

*Today, under the leadership of its Black superintendent, Richmond County strives to do just that. For the 2003-2004 school year 71% of Richmond County's school met the requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress under No Child Left Behind. Eighty percent met the academic goals. For the first time ever, the system average on the Scholastic Aptitude Test topped 1000. One high school earned the Governor's Cup for*

*increasing scores on the SAT by over 100 points and another school was named a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence for having the highest average on the SAT in the state.*

Individual schools and groups of students continue to struggle and despite our efforts there were those we seem unable to reach. My search for solutions drew me to the Curriculum Studies program at Georgia Southern University. In my reading during my first semester John McWhorter (2000) offered an explanation and a solution to which, here at the end of this journey I find myself returning. He writes,

The main reason black students lag behind all others...is that a wariness of books and learning for learning's sake as "white" has become ingrained in black American culture. Segregation and disenfranchisement...had long created a sense of alienation from learning. Separatism... in defining "black" as "that which is not white"...has focused this alienation into a rejection. To be culturally black, sadly, almost requires that one see books and school as a realm to visit rather than live in. (McWhorter, 2000, p. 125)

Today as I complete the circle, McWhorter's explanation and call for Blacks to "stand up, rub our eyes, brush ourselves off, and walk on" seems too simplistic (McWhorter, 2000, p. 213).

Black four and five year olds do not come to school determined not to learn. They are eager and hungry, with a light in their eyes that dims with each passing year they spend in schools. Certainly some come with few of the skills necessary to help them become successful students, but we have the ability to provide those skills, if we choose to do so. It is not that Black culture has rejected learning rather Blacks have come to distrust the schools we compel them to attend and the educators who work in them. Too

often, educators have chosen not to meet our needs and insisted that we conform to the environment they have created to meet theirs. To close the achievement gaps too many Black children are experiencing, we must create schools that welcome them as they are and that are designed to meet their needs.



Figure 13: Me as an Infant



Figure 14: Me on Granny's Front Porch Step



Figure 15: My 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Class



Figure 16: Me and Mom





Figure 17: My Brownie Initiation



Figure 18: My Dad, Fred Duggan, Jr.

Figure 19: Miss Maund's 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Class

June 28, 1973

Hi Everybody,  
 How are things there?  
 They are pretty good here.  
 Although it's hot, the funeral  
 was really good. We are  
 staying at Daddy's parents  
 house. My Aunt Susan, one  
 of Daddy's sisters, is here  
 with two of her kids.  
 My other Aunt was  
 here last week.  
 Right now I stay in  
 the house with three  
 younger boys. So things  
 are kinda dull. Tell  
 Donna and Churchy  
 we miss them.

Your's Sincerely  
 George

Figure 21: A Letter to Friends in Germany



Figure 20: Memorial Marking Field Named for Dad



Figure 22: High School Graduation



Figure 23: Receiving my B.A.



Figure 24: My 1<sup>st</sup> Class, 1983



Figure 25: Me, Mom, and Danielle at Augusta State Graduation, 1998

### **Danielle R. Lowe: Surviving the Re/segregation of American Schools**

*The victory over segregated schools that seemed imminent with the Brown decision in 1954 never truly materialized and by 1980, the Courts were well on the way to reversing any progress that had been made. A Detroit case, Milikin v. Bradley, was the first step toward re/segregation. By the early 1970's, Detroit had a predominately Black, high poverty school system surrounded by "53 overwhelmingly white suburban school districts protruding out from [it] like the spokes of a wheel" (Cann, 2004, p. 76). In 1969 the state legislature required that the Detroit School Board create regional districts and school boards to decentralize its administration. The school board decided to go a step further and prepared an integration plan that involved busing students across district lines. After strong opposition from the community, the state legislature blocked implementation of the plan. The NAACP petitioned the court charging that the legislature had violated the Fourth Amendment of the U. S. Constitution. In September 1971, the Federal District Court found that the Detroit Board of Education "reinforced or fostered segregation and therefore violated the Fourteenth Amendment rights of the school children in Detroit" (Pindur, 2001, p. 246) and ordered the preparation of desegregation plans. An added stipulation was that "based on the pattern of segregation throughout the metropolitan area, that the only acceptable remedy was one that would be directed to the entire Detroit metropolitan area" (p. 246). June, 1972, the Court of Appeals upheld the ruling and in September the case was appealed to the U. S. Supreme Court arguing that the suburban districts should not be included in the busing plan because those districts were not practicing segregation. In July of 1974, the Supreme Court ruled that "the problem of increasingly all black central city schools and white*

*suburban schools was not due to discriminatory actions taken by the suburbs or the state of Michigan” and “ordered the elimination of segregation in the Detroit city schools by the implementation of busing only within the limits of the Detroit school district” (p. 247). Children attending schools today in Augusta-Richmond County, Georgia feel the effects of this decision.*

*By 1973, enrollment in Richmond County’s public school was down by 7000 as white families left the system for private schools (Cashin, 1985). White flight from Richmond County’s public schools eventually grew into white flight from the county itself. While both Richmond and neighboring Columbia County have seen an increase in population since 1970, Columbia County has seen an increase of over 80% compared to less than 12% for Richmond County. During the same time period, the white population in Richmond County has decreased by over 16% (Augusta-Richmond County Comprehensive plan, 2003). Today Blacks represent the largest group of any race in Richmond County (U. S. Bureau of Census, 2000). Over 71% of the 30,000 children enrolled in Richmond County schools are Black; over 65% live below the poverty line (Georgia Department of Education, 2004).*

#### Danielle’s Story

I was born Saturday, November 12, 1983 just after noon. Scientist had just identified the AIDS virus, Alice Walker (1982) had won the Pulitzer Prize for literature for *The Color Purple*, Sally Ride had become the first American woman in space, and Vanessa Williams the first Black Miss America. The backlash against the Civil Rights Movement was well underway as Ronald Regan’s second year as president was coming to an end. Four million Americans were

unemployed; twenty-one percent of all Blacks living in the United States were unemployed; homelessness and hunger were at an all time high; and the National Commission on Excellence in Education had declared America's schools were being threatened by "a rising tide of mediocrity" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). What a world for a Black baby girl to find herself in. My parents were high school sweethearts. After graduation, Mom enrolled at Augusta State eventually earning a bachelors degree in education while my dad enrolled in the local technical school and earned a degree in automotive technology. By 1983 he was working for a local utility company and Mom had begun her teaching career. I was an unexpected blessing but they were determined to give me every possible advantage. So in 1985 they enrolled me in Christagarten, a private preschool on the Fort Gordon Military Base. Although I would not be three years old for another two months, the staff decided to place me in the K-3 class. We have a picture of me on my first day, standing beside my grandmother's car wearing a pink pleated skirt and white blouse; lunchbox in hand. What I remember best of my time there are the field trips. The public school system required students turn five years old by September 1 to enter kindergarten so two years later I enrolled in the K-5 kindergarten program at Hillcrest Baptist Church School, a white church school. My teacher nicknamed me "Bouncy Wouncy" because I would not walk in a straight line like the rest of the class. She said I was like a delightful bouncing ball at the end of the line. In second grade I transferred from Hillcrest to predominately Meadowbrook Elementary, our zoned public school in Richmond County. The move was hard

but necessary. My parents had divorced by then and Mom couldn't afford the private school tuition. I adjusted and Meadowbrook came to feel like home. I was an honor roll student up until fifth grade. Then I started having trouble with Social Studies. I hate Social Studies. It doesn't make sense to me and even now it's hard. From Meadowbrook I went to Morgan Road Middle School. My sixth grade was rough. I stayed in trouble. I even tried cutting class one day, hiding out in the bathroom with a friend. Of course we were caught and ended up serving several hours of detention. I spent a lot of time in detention but my grades were decent and I sat first chair in the band, meaning I was the best! By the end of the year, Mom had had enough so for seventh and eighth grades I went to Spirit Creek Middle School where she taught. I hated being there with her but managed to have some good times anyway. In seventh grade I was in the advanced band where I sat first chair again. Mr. Greer was the band director and my favorite teacher. All my other teachers said I talked too much. He said my talking was a sign of intelligence. In eighth grade Mr. Greer left so I switched to chorus. I sang solos in all of our performance and became one of the first students from Spirit Creek to participate in All State Chorus. That was exciting. I still have the CD of our performance. Eighth grade was tough though. My favorite teacher, Mrs. Starr, resigned in February. Two months later one of my classmates died. Stefany lived just a block up the street from us. One of our teachers dropped her off at home after drama practice that evening. Stefany got out of the car and walked behind it to check the mail. She was hit by a car and died instantly. I still remember hearing the sirens. We dedicated the 8<sup>th</sup> grade

commencement to Stefany. In August, I started high school. There were over 1900 students at Hephzibah High that year. It was so overcrowded there were almost as many portables as there were classrooms. Four of my six classes were in portables. I kept a cold. Moving through the halls was a nightmare. I can still picture the principal, Mr. Allen, making his way through the crowds with teachers trying to maneuver around kids to get to him. He was not really very involved. Getting from class to class in the five minutes for class change was impossible. It was faster to walk around the outside of the building than to go through it. I was actually suspended for the first time ever for being tardy too many times. Other kids would have so many tardies they would end up suspended out of school several times. Before they knew it they would have so many absences they couldn't earn credit for the semester. Then they would just stop coming at all. Then there were the days when stink bombs and fire crackers would be set off during class change or someone would call in a bomb threat. There were three groups at Hephzibah. There were the Goths with their black hair, black clothes and long black trench coats, the Rednecks with their confederate flags and baseball caps, and the Blacks. Tension was high especially after Columbine. Black trench coats were banned after that. There were some good times my freshman year. I got contacts so I wouldn't have to wear my glasses and was finally allowed to wear make-up. I participated in my first (and last) beauty pageant – Georgia Miss Perfect Teen. That was different. Odrice became my first love – I guess. We “dated” into my eleventh grade year when he dumped me for a new chick. My tenth grade year I made the band as a dance girl and joined

the Step Team. The next year I turned sixteen and was finally allowed to date. I also got into some trouble that I would rather not share and flunked my first class – anatomy. I took the class because of my chemistry teacher. He thought I could handle it because I had done so well with chemistry. I shouldn't have listened. I went to the prom in a busted Chevy Lumina because my father decided to take the engine out of my grandmother's Lincoln Town Car the day of the Prom. In the end I survived it all and earned enough credits to go on to twelfth grade. But I needed a change. I transferred to Glenn Hills High School, the school my parents had graduated from. It felt like home from the first day. Less than half of the students at Hephizbah were Black. Glenn Hills was almost all Black and many of my classmates were friends from the old neighborhood. I joined the band again as a dance girl, fell in love with Mike Walker, and in May 2001 graduated with a college preparatory diploma. My dream was to attend Morris Brown College in Atlanta or Johnson C. Smith in Charlotte. Both are historically Black colleges and I had attended summer band camp at both during high school. Mom said we couldn't afford either one so I decided to stay home. I had worked as a shampoo girl/apprentice in the hair salon since eighth grade and loved it. So I applied for Augusta Tech's cosmetology program. I couldn't enter until January so Mom suggested that I enroll in Augusta State University for the fall semester. I hated it. I felt out of place, like everyone knew something that was helping them "get it" in class and I had missed out on whatever that was. I left Augusta State after that semester and enter the cosmetology program in January. I had a baby in September and still finished the program on schedule in March. It didn't take



long for me to know I don't want to do hair for the rest of my life. So in the Fall of 2003 I enrolled at Paine College, a local historically Black college. The course work just wasn't challenging enough though so the next year I transferred back to Augusta State. I'm majoring in accounting. Next semester I'll be a junior. I asked my mom one day if she thought that teaching would be my calling. She said yes. I think she's probably right but right now I am just not ready to admit it. I don't think I have the patience but maybe one day...



Figure 26: Danielle, Augusta Technical College Graduation



Figure 27: Danielle and her son, DaJaun

As Danielle and I reflected on her story, we were struck by how little she talks about learning. I was reminded of a conversation we had shortly after she entered high school. We were discussing why she had invested so little into her education while in middle school. Everyone knew, she told me, that middle school was a game. It didn't

really count for anything. You just had to get through it. I remember thinking at the time how sad it was that children considered education a game. Now I wonder if their understandings of their experiences were more sophisticated and accurate than my own. Perhaps they understood that schools are not designed to educate. Perhaps they knew they were being schooled in a game and that those who did not follow the rules would be left behind.



Figure 28: Baby Danielle



Figure 30: Graduation from Hillcrest



Figure 29: First day of Pre-school, 1986



Figure 31: Receiving High School Diploma, 2001

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **REFLECTIONS: A VIEW FROM THE DISTANCE**

In this chapter, I summarize seven findings that emerge from my dissertation:

(1) The previously hidden impact of race and racism becomes visible when I view my stories through the lens of Critical Race Theory. (2) Through this inquiry, I break the silence permeating my historical, community, and personal narratives and find the courage to speak and act against orthodoxy and oppression. (3) The auto/biographical stories of Black women educators provide a counter-narrative to hegemonic beliefs about Black women in general and Black women educators in particular. (4) With this counter-narrative, I rewrite my own story, resisting controlling images of Black women and defining myself as a Black woman administrator. (5) Mainstream educational institutions fail to value the history of Black education in America. Through this work, I disrupt this silence in my own education. (6) Early Black educators' demonstration of a care-and-justice ethic enabled Black students to be successful despite the systemic racism of public education. (7) Auto/biography as a form of inquiry offers a valuable resource for developing visionary school leaders.

My study explores the lives of five generations of women in my family: my great grandmother, Hattie Cummings Wilcher, my grandmother, Lilla Wilcher Wright, my mother, Connie Wilcher Duggan, my daughter, Danielle Renee Lowe, and my own. In 1914 my great grandmother, Hattie Cummings Wilcher, began her teaching career in a one room schoolhouse in Jenkins County, Georgia. She dedicated 37 years of her life to educating her people. My mother, Connie Wilcher Duggan, began her education in that schoolhouse and went on to graduate from T. J. Elder High School, the first high school

for Black students in Washington County, Georgia. My daughter, Danielle Renee Lowe, lived the resegregation of American classrooms. She overcame low expectations and negative perceptions to successfully finish high school. Now in college, she struggles to complete her own education as she begins to guide her son's. Grandma Lilla's love of quilting inspires me to view our life stories as a collection of quilt squares pieced together from various memories and stories. Each of these women's lives intertwines with my own as a student, teacher, and educational leader. As I share my reflections on this work I also share moments from our lives. These quilt squares, presented in italics, highlight the impact of racism on our experiences and testify to our struggles and triumphs.

*Schools in Lawton were desegregated when I entered Gladys Fullerton's 1<sup>st</sup> grade class at Eisenhower Elementary School in 1968. My memories of that first year in school are limited...the teacher slamming a ruler down on my desk because I was talking... learning to read with Dick and Jane...an evening spent with my mother trying to learn the difference between a 6 and a 9... wanting to be a member of the Blue Birds but having to join the Brownies instead... the scolding Mom received from my teacher because I had not attended kindergarten. I had lived a life full of rich experiences. Unfortunately those experiences did not fit inside Miss Fullerton's curriculum...*

—Sonya

When I view our quilt of stories through the lens of Critical Race Theory, the previously hidden role of race and racism becomes visible (Thesis finding 1). The absence of my race and culture in those Dick and Jane stories and in my first grade classroom becomes apparent. My parents could not anticipate the isolation and fear I felt

as one of only two Black children in Miss Fullerton's classroom. For them and many others of their generation, school desegregation held the power to liberate their children. They believed the skills and knowledge we gained in white schools would free us to rise above the racism they had experienced. These beliefs from home paired with the white middle class environment I faced in school left me blind to the role race played in my life. Deconstructing my denial required a theory that would open my eyes to race and racism. Critical Race Theory recognizes racism as endemic to life in America and embedded in the stories of the marginalized. It values those stories and shines a light on the impact of race and racism in them. Viewing our stories through Critical Race Theory changes my understanding of our experiences. My new understanding changes me and impacts every colleague, teacher, student, and parent I encounter.

Throughout this process of change, I suffered through long periods of silence. Silence and fear have been connected in my life for as long as I can remember, passed down through the generations from my great grandmother Hattie. Granny understood that as a Black woman speaking the wrong words to the wrong person (especially if that person were white) could lead to physical injury or death. She taught my mother to choose not only her words but her tone and timing carefully. I heard these lessons in Mom's warnings to watch my mouth. My experiences as a student in classrooms reinforced my mother's warnings. If I kept silent I would not confirm Miss Fullerton's belief that I was less intelligent and less capable than the others. I survived that first grade classroom and many others by keeping silent. I believed my silence hid a lack of understanding. In reality, it became my shield to hide behind when I was afraid.

By writing my story, I had hoped to finally conquer the fear. I came to understand, however, that there will be no single victory. With each new venture outside my comfort zone I must face it again. As I assume the role of researcher for social justice (Ayers, 2006) the risk of being unacceptable increases. Speaking up and acting out against the status quo at times requires being offensive. Through this work I face the fear and risk offending those who disagree with my perspective. By sharing my stories and the understandings that emerged from my inquiry, I break the silence permeating my narratives and I find the courage not only to speak up but to act out against the orthodoxy confining too many Black children to oppressive classroom environments (Thesis Finding 2).

*I taught school for over 37 years before retiring in 1949. My parents made sure we got an education and I made sure my children...did too. My sons Jack and Remus left the South... and built dry cleaning businesses. Lilla...my youngest daughter...ran a successful business from home.*

*—Hattie*

Through this intergenerational auto/biographical study, I also begin to see through the false images society projects onto the women in my family (Collins, 2000) (Thesis finding 3). For years my Grandma Lilla worked as a housekeeper for a white family. After age would not allow her to continue keeping house, she cleaned the law offices of one of the family members. She held this job until her sudden death five years ago. After burying her mother, Mom consulted the same lawyer about settling Grandma Lilla's affairs. Because of the long history his family shared with my grandmother, Mom felt she could trust his advice. Initially, he tried to dismiss my mother. My

grandmother's holdings, he said, would not be significant enough to involve the courts. I will always remember the look in his eyes when Mom mentioned the properties Grandma Lilla owned.

As a white male looking at my Black grandmother, he saw only a servant whose labor could not result in an estate worth settling. His view of my grandmother differed significantly from how she viewed herself and how I have come to see her. Like her mother, Hattie, Grandma Lilla refused to accept the dominant culture's portrait of her as a poor and desperate caregiver. She defined herself as an intelligent, shrewd business woman taking advantage of every opportunity to contribute to the future security of her family. The stories of those who had gone before her gave Grandma Lilla the courage to reject the negative images others were too willing to project on her. Her story and those of other self-defined Black women form counter-narratives that allow Black women to imagine things differently for ourselves (Thesis finding 3).

Popular culture offers few opportunities for us to view empowered Black women like my grandmother. Movies and television bombard us with narrow images of Black women as servers, seducers, and manipulators (Harris, 2003). Popular culture uses these same images to portray Black women educators giving us characters such as Marilyn Sudor, the sexy music teacher on *Boston Public* (Kelly, 2000), and Regina, the professional but insecure principal on *The Steve Harvey Show* (Lathan, 1996).

Because the authority to define societal values is a major instrument of power, elite groups, in exercising power, manipulate ideas about Black womanhood.

They do so by exploiting already existing images, or creating new ones. These controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms

of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life. (Collins, 2000, p. 70)

The Marilyn and Regina characters embody negative images those in power use to blame Black women for our own victimization (Taylor, 1998). Without stories to contradict such images, we accept them as truth and form our identities around them.

Auto/biography provides counter-stories.

Through reading the lives of other Black women and writing my own, I uncovered the falseness of the controlling images I have internalized. Now I work to define myself incorporating images of empowered and successful Black women. I reject internalized images of myself as less intelligent, less capable, and less deserving and redefine myself as a competent, capable, and empowered Black woman educator (Thesis finding 3).

*While news of the Brown v. Board ruling passed without incident in Sandersville, the South reacted with massive resistance. Voters approved an amendment to the Georgia constitution allowing the elimination of the public school system... The Georgia General Assembly made it a felony to allow integration... Black teachers were ordered to withdraw from the NAACP... The confederate battle emblem was placed alongside the state seal on the state flag.*

—Sonya

My study began as a paper entitled “The Ghosts of Integration”. In it I explored the legal history around the desegregation of public schools in the United States and the loss of care in schools that followed. Intertwined throughout were stories I collected from my mother’s life in segregated classrooms and from my husband’s life in



classrooms transitioning after desegregation. A comparison of their stories with my own experiences in desegregated schools revealed that *Brown v. Board of Education* had not delivered the equality of experience those who fought for it believed it promised. Sharing classrooms with white children did not guarantee that Black children would benefit in the same way and the loss of care many experienced after desegregation guaranteed that they would not. For those of us who were successful, too often the price was our identities as members of our Black communities. This understanding led to curiosity about the impact my experiences in desegregated classrooms have had on my current work as an elementary school principal. What lessons, I wondered, could I find in my stories and in the history of Black education? How might those lessons be applied to improving contemporary urban schools? How might we develop leaders needed to guide the changes?

My previous studies offered little help in answering these questions. The history of American education I studied as an undergraduate and later in graduate school did not include the stories of Black education. I had some understanding of the differing philosophies of W. E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington. Black History Month observances ensured I recognized Mary McCleod Bethune as the founder of a school for Blacks. I was ignorant, however, of the harm embedded in white missionaries' efforts to assimilate Blacks through education and of the rich industrialists' attempts to use education to relegate "Black workers to the lowest forms of labor" (Anderson, 1988, p. 36). I was also ignorant of Black communities' commitment to education as a vehicle for personal and racial uplift and their success at circumventing the system to achieve their educational goals.

“The history of education...is concerned with building a full understanding of the current educational situation through the study of the evolution of educational practices, ideas, and institutions in social context” (Pulliam and Van Patten, 1995, p. 6). Reaching a full understanding of Black education in America requires viewing that evolution through a racial context as well. Through this work, I disrupt the absence of race in my own understanding of the history of education (Thesis finding 5). I develop a fuller understanding of that history through an exploration of the stories of Black education, its founders, and the Black educators who made it work in spite of the many obstacles they encountered. There are lessons to be learned from educators such as Lucy C. Laney, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Anna Julia Cooper and the institutions they served.

Lucy C. Laney envisioned educated Black women as the key to lifting the burdens of “ignorance... shame and crime and prejudice” (Laney, 1897). This vision led her to found Haines Normal School in Augusta, Georgia. It was under Laney’s leadership that Mary McLeod Bethune developed her vision of educating Black children, a vision that led to her founding Bethune-Cookman College. Both of these women encountered incredible hardships as they worked to bring their visions to life. They and others like them struggled against limited financial resources, poor physical facilities, and other hardships to bring schools to those who would otherwise not have them. Their stories relate a care-and-justice ethic (Walker and Snarey, 2006, p.6) that allowed them to counter many of the negative effects of the racism so endemic to America’s public education system (Thesis finding 6).

The question of whether educational policies and practices should be guided by an ethic of justice which “aims at a society...in which people are treated fairly”, or an ethic

of caring which seeks “a society...in which nurturance and relationships are highly valued” (Strike, 1999, p. 21) has long been debated. Absent from the conversation have been the communal experiences of Black Americans who often “see both justice and care as necessary for their children’s development” (Walker and Snarey, 2004, p.6). “Unlike the either-or construction of care and justice that has polarized the moral education debate, for many in the [Black] community, justice and care are equally yoked and, in effect, form a unified and overarching care-and-justice ethic” (p. 131). A care-and-justice ethic seeks both equity in the distribution of resources and opportunities and careful attention to the development of the whole child (Walker and Snarey, 2004).

Certainly the most notable example of Black communities’ commitment to justice in education lies in the battle to desegregate public schools. The fight waged by litigants in *Brown v. Board of Education* was not about sharing space with white children. They sought equity in the quality of education their children received. They believed admittance into white schools would achieve that goal. Today, more than fifty years after the initial ruling in *Brown v. Board*, the equity they sought still eludes Black communities while the care evident in pre-Brown Black schools has disappeared.

*Washington County Training School...was renamed Thomas Jefferson Elder High and Industrial School in 1933 and when I went there ten years later it still had 1<sup>st</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades... My classes included Algebra, Biology, English, Oration, World History, American History, Typing, and Home Economics. My teachers cared about us and expected us to do our best.*

—Connie

In *Teaching to Transgress* bell hooks (1994) recalls her experiences in a segregated school where the same caring my mother experienced existed.

They were committed to nurturing intellect so that we could become scholars, thinkers, and cultural workers... We learned early that our devotion to learning... was a counter-hegemonic act.... black children who were deemed exceptional, gifted were given special care. Teachers worked with and for us to ensure that we would fulfill our intellectual destiny and by so doing uplift the race... I loved being a student. I loved learning. School was the place of ecstasy. (p. 3)

hooks' teachers demonstrated caring through their "direct attention... to [meeting] the psychological, sociological, and academic needs" of their students (Walker, 1993, p.65). This caring, "manifested in the form of teacher attitudes, expectations and behaviors about students' human value, intellectual capabilities, and performance responsibilities" (Gay, 2000, p. 45) enabled Black children to be successful learners in spite of the hardships most segregated Black schools endured.

History tends to view Black educational institutions in the same "deficit mindset" (Gay, 2000, p. 24) through which it wrongly views Black children. However, to remember segregated schools largely by recalling only their poor resources presents a historically incomplete picture. Although black schools were indeed commonly lacking in facilities and funding, some evidence suggests that the environment of the segregated school had affective traits... that helped black children learn in spite of the neglect their schools received from white school boards. (Walker, 1996, p. 3)

Although others suggest that such positions “romanticize the pre-Brown days” (Shaw, 1996, ¶11), the point that there were Black schools where climates of interpersonal caring were beneficial to Black students is a valid one. When schools and communities pair such caring with a commitment to seeking justice they create an ethic of care-and-justice and incredible things happen.

Such a care-and-justice ethic is evident in Anna Julia Cooper’s work at M Street Colored High School in Washington, D. C. During her tenure as principal at M Street Cooper implemented a curriculum that allowed “the opportunity for the same or equivalent work [to] be afforded the colored children of Washington as might be found if they were white” (Cooper as cited in Titone and Maloney, 1999, p. 80). As a result, M Street graduates were admitted directly into universities including Harvard, Yale, and Brown. Despite such success stories, Cooper’s white supervisor insisted Black students were incapable of success with such a curriculum and demanded that she discontinue her efforts. A commitment to justice led Cooper to refuse. Eventually the school board, siding with the director, dismissed her. Cooper’s commitment to care-and-justice resonates with other stories from segregated Black schools, including Carswell County Training School.

The caring of teachers at Carswell County Training School in North Carolina, paired with the justice seeking of the community on behalf of the school, resulted in many students reaching “their highest potential” (Walker, 1996, p. 169).

The task of teaching as [Carswell teachers] saw it was to make sure that other Negro children had opportunities similar to those they had had. Never mind that some of the class sizes were as high as seventy in the 1930’s, and that classes of

sixty were common even into the 1940's. Teaching was more than the imparting of subject matter; it was the task of molding children to be successful. Theirs was a job of collective racial uplift. (Walker, 1996, p. 149)

Parents expected such caring for their children from the school while advocates worked outside of school for justice. They “interposed themselves between the needs of the Negro community and the power of the white school board and made requests on behalf of the school” (p. 19). Such advocates are critical to closing achievement gaps evident in many contemporary urban schools.

*There were over 1900 students at my high school. It was so overcrowded there were almost as many portables as there were classrooms... Moving through the halls was a nightmare... Kids would end up suspended for tardies over and over. Before they knew it they would have so many absences they couldn't earn credit for the semester. Then they would just stop coming at all...*

*—Danielle*

Gaps in achievement, visible at all levels of education, do not occur by chance. The policies and procedures imposed on public schools ensure their inevitability. Our public schools were designed from the beginning to confine minorities to the lowest levels of American society while providing them with the hope of achieving the American dream. It is also not by chance that some of us defy the statistics. We provide the hope. I am reminded of the family who lived next door to us during my early elementary school years. While their father, like mine, was in the military, their family was much larger than ours and as a result their economic status, considerably lower. Their home was less organized and their appearance appreciably less middle class. I

have no doubt their experiences in our desegregated middle class elementary school were very different from mine.

My own experiences would have been very different if not for my family. A “belief that education makes the difference” (Hrabawski, Maton, Greene, and Greif, 2002, p. 211) threads through the generations of my family, passed down to Granny Hattie by her father as she witnessed his involvement in founding the first school for Black children in Washington County, Georgia. Granny Hattie in turn passed it to my mother, Connie, as they walked those miles to and from her one room schoolhouse. I received the same message from my mother as she supervised my homework, participated in P. T. A., paid for book club orders, and ensured I always had the supplies and materials necessary for school. It was a message reinforced as I watched her return to school and be successful. Now after having instilled this same belief in my daughter I watch as she passes it on to her four year old son.

That belief fueled my mother’s determination to see that the education I received was just. Her direct involvement ensured that the teachers I encountered knew someone cared for me and was willing to protect and defend me to the end. My parents were also able and willing to make sure that my dress, appearance, and language reflected middle class white values, increasing the likelihood that I would be treated fairly. To close the achievement gaps suffered by too many minority children, schools must find ways to negate race, class, and gender-based judgments. They must create environments that provide caring-and-just educations for all students.

How then do we transform urban schools to reflect the care-and-justice ethic early Black educators demonstrated? We begin with a commitment to all students learning and

having opportunities to apply literacy and mathematical skills. This requires interventions for those who lack the knowledge the system expects them to have upon entering school, frequent monitoring of their acquisition of the skills being taught, and opportunities to catch up when their performance falls below expectations. It also requires safety nets such as tutoring and extended day programs that can provide the sense of security students need to attempt challenging curriculum. Opportunities to apply their skills in meaningful and relevant contexts must be provided through integrated community based units and projects.

Transformed urban schools provide opportunities for Black children to learn their history as Black Americans and as members of the African Diaspora. This does not mean replacing the required curriculum but rather teaching that curriculum from a perspective that allows Black children to see themselves and their history in a positive light and in a manner that respects their cultural identity. “Every person ought, on some level, to cherish her or his culture” and have “a feeling of ownership of one’s personal history” (Greene, 1995, p. 163), an opportunity not afforded Black students by the curriculum found in most public schools. They must either accept the normative history as their own, alienating themselves from their culture in the process, or refuse the schooling offered to them (Shujaa, 1994). Through the integration of Black American and African history, literature, music and art into the taught curriculum students learn they are “not what a racist world would have them to believe” (Thompson, 2004, p. 29). Without such an experience they become vulnerable and unable to resist internalizing the controlling images popular culture bombards them with from birth.



Another focus of urban school transformation involves encouraging a sense of school membership. “The threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype” (Steele, 2003, p. 111) leads some students to disidentify with school. Accepting learners as members of two cultures facilitates a sense of school membership. Providing learners with the skills necessary for full participation in the majority culture while honoring their culture of origin, facilitates a sense of belonging and encourages students to identify with school (Perry, 2003).

Urban school transformation requires teachers who are committed to the success of Black children and who believe in their ability to guide them to that success (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Such teachers emphasize the importance of community and relationships, encourage collaborative learning, view content critically and believe it is their responsibility to help students develop the skills essential to their success. They explicitly communicate high standards, believe in their students’ abilities to meet those standards, and then “teach as if the woods were on fire” to ensure they do (Crawford, 1996, p. 88).

Transformed urban schools provide students with exposure to new ideas, career opportunities, cultural experiences, and motivational role models. This can be accomplished through assembly programs similar to those held in segregated Black schools such as Carswell County Training Center. There the assembly

served at least two functions. First, it...gave students the opportunity to demonstrate their interests and exercise their talents before other students... The second function of [assembly] was to serve as a teaching situation. During these

times of group teaching the principal talked about daily occurrences in the life of the school, historical events that had significance for their education, and life plans they should be making. (Walker, 1996, p. 109-110)

Such school-wide meetings provide an opportunity for building a sense of school identity, offer an opportunity to teach group behavior expected by larger society, and expose students “to ideas they might not otherwise hear” (p. 112).

A final aspect of urban school transformation involves partnering with communities to pursue equity in resources. Georgia House Bill 1187: The A+ Education Reform Act (2000) requires that all public schools establish school councils comprised of principals, teachers, parents, and community representatives. School councils work “to bring communities and schools closer together in a spirit of cooperation to solve difficult education problems” (p. 13). They offer an ideal sight for engaging in “participatory social inquiry” (Oakes and Rogers, 2006, p. 35). Educators, parents, researchers from local colleges and universities, and business/community representatives would work together to “shape policy through information gathering, exchange, interpretation, and debate” (p. 39). Out of this collaboration would come a mutual goal for educational change.

The transformation of urban schools and their relationships with parents and communities must begin with a change in the mindset of those who lead public schools. Programs designed to prepare educational leaders tend to focus on the day to day practice of public school administration. Topics of study include supervision of curriculum, human resource planning, application of law in educational settings, and management of finances, information, time, records, facilities, and resources. Each topic certainly has

value for anyone anticipating school leadership at any level. However, for those of us leading urban schools struggling to educate children living on the margins of our society, this is not enough.

Urban schools need transformative leaders who see beyond statistics relating race, poverty, and student achievement and envision schools that offer all students the opportunity to achieve. My inquiry demonstrates that writing and reading auto/biographies has the power to create such leaders (Thesis finding 7). Through reflective readings of stories from my own experiences in schools along side the stories of others whose experiences differed from mine, I gained an understanding of how my experiences influence my practice. With that understanding, I became more mindful in my vision for the school I now lead and how my practices support that vision. Building on lessons learned from early Black curriculum scholars, I offer a framework for transforming contemporary urban schools.

The public education system was designed “to perpetuate and maintain the society’s existing power relations and the institutional structures that support those arrangements” (Shujaa, 1994, p. 15). Early Black educators circumvented and work within the system to ensure that their students were educated. Those of us leading twenty-first century urban schools are in a position to do so again. While the phrase school reform is routinely used as code for improving the performance of minority children, the voices of minority educators are too often absent from the discussion. Stories from the history of Black education testify to the ability of Black educators from Lucy Craft Laney to Marva Collins to reach and teach Black children. If we are willing to listen, they have so much to tell us.

## EPILOGUE

I met my closest friends for dinner recently. The fact that they are both white and I am Black intrigues me but will have to be explored in another space. As we stand around the Virginia's kitchen counter Cheryl asked, "Who are you today because of your experiences as a child in school?" As I listen to Virginia share her stories of school, three powerful memories begin swirling around in my mind. In the first, I am in a classroom alone among strangers for the first time. I burn my leg on the wood burning stove heating the room. I have been warned not to cry. I am a big girl now and big girls don't cry. I suffer in silence, not sure I can share my pain without crying. In the second, I sit in a desk talking to another student. An angry teacher slams a ruler across my desk. I come to see speaking as a risky act that can lead to anger and punishment. I sit in reading group in the third. My peers read aloud from a chart but I am unsure of the words. If I were smart enough for the top group I would be sure. I choose to remain silent.

I share my memories then listen as Cheryl shares hers. I sense the beginnings of a new quilt, stitched together from the remnants of memories across three very different lives yet revealing hauntingly similar themes of fear, loneliness, and silence. As I listen and reflect I again see that we are who we are because of the remembered experiences we have shared. Whether we remember school as a joyful haven, a temporary refuge, or a lonely prison we became educators because of our experiences in those spaces and those experiences impact our daily work in schools. Educational research should also impact our work in schools. It ought to go beyond the mere production of scholarship and seek to transform lives. Transformative research enables us to see the sufferings of others and empowers us to challenge the orthodoxy that allows such suffering (Ayers, 2006). Fifty

two years after the initial ruling in *Brown v. Board*, Black children continue to suffer in America's classrooms.

In 2005, 12% of the 43,000 Black third grade students who took the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test did not meet the standard in Reading (Georgia Department of Education Report Card, 2005). Because meeting the standard is required for promotion to fourth grade, over 5,000 Black children (more than double the number of white children) were retained in third grade. At fifth grade where meeting the standard in Reading and Mathematics is required for promotion, 15% of the 45,000 Black students taking the Reading test did not meet the standard while 20% of those taking the Mathematics test did not meet the standard. Over 14,000 Black students in the state of Georgia were retained at the end of the 2005 school year. "Students who are retained in one grade are 40% to 50% more likely to drop out than promoted students and students who are retained in two grades are 90% more likely to drop out" (Jimerson, Anderson, and Whipple, 2002). The median income for Black 18 year olds who do not graduate from high school is less than \$11,000 per year. Over 14,000 Black children were put at risk for a life lived below the poverty line. Transformative research focuses our gaze on those children and calls to us to challenge the school structures, policies, and procedures that would impose such suffering.

This work began by questioning why Black children disengage from school. As my understanding of the context surrounding Black education in America grew, their suffering became visible and my question evolved to challenge the orthodoxy of public education. I began to question how schools might be transformed into spaces that enable Black children to "fulfill [their] intellectual destiny" (hooks, 1994, p.3). I developed an

ethic of care-and-justice as a framework for creating such schools and I now work to apply that framework in my daily work as principal of a Title I elementary school.

In the two years since I began my study, I have settled into my work at that school. The disconnect I felt in those days immediately after accepting the position have eased over time and I have begun to see myself as “the principal”. The school has also begun to heal. Staff members have stopped wearing spirit shirts displaying the names of their previous schools. They now see themselves as members of our school family. For students who experienced the disruption of rezoning, the healing progresses more slowly. The anger they and their parents harbored has begun to subside as we earn their trust. Attendance at P.T.A. meetings is up and parents are beginning to share their ideas and concerns. Feedback from recent parent teacher conferences indicates they are pleased with the work we are doing.

We began the new school year with the renovations of the building completed. We also began the as one of seventeen Richmond County Schools that did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) last year. While our third, fourth, and fifth grade students met the standard in Mathematics in every subgroup with 76% meeting it overall, only 59% of our economically disadvantaged students met it in Reading. We face no sanctions this year, but we also receive no additional resources to support us in making AYP next year. We have been awarded three more years of funding under the Reading First grant. Despite the constraints written into the grant, our administrative team has been able to satisfy the state facilitators while remaining true to our vision for literacy education. We see promising results, particularly in kindergarten, first, and second grades.

My daughter, Danielle, is now a junior accounting major at Augusta State University. With support from me and my mother, she juggles school, work, and parenting. Her son, DaJaun, attends Head Start now. He can already recite the alphabet, identify all of the capital letters by name, and count to thirty by himself. He loves basketball, playing the drums, and books. Every now and then he puts on my nametag and announces that he will be a teacher when he grows up.

I keep a picture of my great grandmother Hattie along with several of her textbooks and her desk bell on my office bookcase. Those days when I question why I do they work I do and doubt my competence in doing it well, they remind me that her blood runs through my veins. I do what I do because it is my calling. With the lessons she and so many others left for me, I know I can be successful.

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